The Hungarian Quarterly

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Back cover: *Budapest, in front of the Parliament. The proclamation of the 3rd Hungarian Republic. Photo by Lajos Kárász.*

Gergely Péterfy

Pit Lake

Excerpt from the novel

"They come here to drown themselves," says the guard. "They think they're coming for a swim, because they don't know it's to drown."

The edge of the road is overgrown with weeds, the tiny, unidentifiable kind of weed that is on the bare edge of existence. All the way alongside stretch wisps of hair and strands of tape from video- and audiocassettes, fluttering in the breeze. "Anyone who wants to bathe, that is, to drown, has to come along this path," the guard says. He has no cap, no stick, no uniform, just a scrap of cloth tacked onto his chest on which the word 'GUARD' is written in felt-tipped pen. "It fades in the sun every summer. I have to write 'GUARD' again every spring. Last year I still had a green felt-tip, now there's only blue. I preferred the green. More official-looking." He has never felt secure since having to write 'GUARD' with a blue felt-tipped pen. The other day he had been attacked, and he attributed the attack to the blue felt-tip. "Before, no one would ever have dared attack me. Not even my own father." He had been attacked from behind the bushes. One had jumped out in front, the other had sneaked up behind his back. "I'm a guard," the guard had said. "There's no guards here," retorted the one standing in front of him. "It's a free bathing area." And with that he lashed out. The one behind him had jumped on him, the attacker in front hit him. Three times in the solar plexus. Then they walked off. "I yelled after them as well: 'You're going to drown yourselves!', but they only laughed." The slapping flip-flops raised clouds of dust around their ankles. Those clouds of dust are what they disappeared in.

Gergely Péterfy

has published three novels and a children's book, as well as radio plays and stories, many of which have been translated into various languages. His novel Bányató *(Pit Lake) was a critical success in Germany (*Baggersee, *2008). It is reviewed by László Márton on pp. 119–125 of this issue.*

He was left lying on the path, video- and audiocassette tapes and weeds flapping around his head. "I didn't want to get to my feet any more. But then I thought, I've earned the right to see the water spitting up their corpses." That's unless they are hanging on to something under the water, the door handle of a cooker, or a washbasin on the bottom of the pit lake. "People who are drowning often have no idea which way is up or down, so they struggle even deeper down and hang on there." The bottom of the pit lake is littered with the dead bodies of those who had hung on in that way. Crouching all round a cooker and stretched out round a washbasin. "There are even some who are clinging on to one another," the guard says.

"Let's go to the boozer," he says. I've been living by the pit lake for twenty years and never knew there is a boozer. "You bet. Every pit lake has a boozer. A boozer and a guard." And indeed, there was the boozer. "This is Irma. And this one here is my friend. He's been living here by the pit lake for twenty years now." Irma was a feathered dinosaur, a nylon bag spread over live coals, the trunk of an acacia tree in a truck park. "I've also been living here a long time! I like it here. Twenty years is a long time." "There's longer times than that. But let's not say a word about that. My friend wants a drink," says the guard.

Irma wipes the coffee grounds out of the glass, but the grounds stay there. She pours the wine in. Maybe it's not coffee grounds but ants or poppy-seed. "That's my brother's wine. Home-brewed. No muck," says Irma. "Good wine, this. Her brother makes it from grapes from their own garden," says the guard. I've been living by the pit lake for twenty years and never before drunk any of Irma's brother's home-brewed wine. Spent oil, vinegar and goat's piss, with ants thrown in. "Got the knack, your brother," I say. "Indeed, he has," says Irma, "and he also lives by the pit lake. Born here as well. You can't learn that sort of thing."

Irma's brother had tried to leave the pit lake on more than one occasion. "I hate the pit lake," he had told Irma, Irma says. When he was young, thirty or forty years ago, he had wanted to get some schooling. "He said he wanted to go to school. He didn't want to go to rot here by the pit lake. Go to rot—that's what he said. God had singled him out, had plans for him, he said," says Irma. Irma's brother, the wine-maker, loved opera. "He went to the Opera to be able to make some sort of start. He didn't know what he was going to start on but he felt that he had to go to the Opera." And as he was sitting there, in the Opera, it came to him that he wasn't really suited to it... "A sort of sixth sense. 'I sensed that I'm not really suited to it,' he said," says Irma. So Irma's brother had come home, and he has been making wine by the pit lake ever since. "A happy fellow, he is. Winemakers are happy fellows as a rule," says Irma.

"They come here to drown themselves," says the guard. "They think they're coming for a swim, because they don't know it's to drown."

He doesn't have dreams about drowning; he has never choked either in water or anything else, so he doesn't know what choking is like, but even if

he did, he would certainly not be in a position to know what death by drowning is like. Quite a lot separates choking from death by drowning. The whole point, in fact: choking is the more serious bit of dying, and that is something that, fortunately, he is not acquainted with. And even though he daily puts his life on the line by being a guard at the pit lake, for some reason he feels that for him death at the pit lake is out of the question. "For me dying in the pit lake is out of the question because I never swim in it. I don't even dip a toe in it. I have watched swimmers a lot, all sorts of swimmers in all sorts of places, and I have come to a firm opinion about swimming, that swimming is bound to lead to drowning. A swimmer, anyone you like, only swims in order to avoid drowning. Swimming was invented purely in order to avoid drowning. Human beings are not made to be in water, which you can see from how unbelievably pathetic people look when they take a dip in water. Hands aren't made for swimming with, feet aren't made for swimming with. A man in water looks like a fish on dry land, or a bird in the soil, and so on—dead from the start. A swimmer is already dead. Children that learn to swim are learning the art of drowning, a very complicated and deferred form of drowning. Some engage in it at a fairly advanced level, competing at who is quicker in getting to the deferred drowning. Some of them win those competitions and are fêted, the losers slink away with long faces."

In the guard's view that is pathetic. A person looks odd enough just walking around, the hands flailing about, the head rolling, the legs swinging and smacking down on the ground—that's not nice, but a man walking, a seated person and one who rummages around while seated is even so a nicer sight than a swimmer; indeed, when it comes down to it, just about the only time people look nice is when they are not moving, when they are lying down, not breathing. Only a dead man is good-looking, says the guard. By the time he is drowned, a swimmer looks good. A drowned swimmer floats, at the end he does not struggle, flail, or compete in his flailing, but rests, loosens up and floats quietly. A floating person is nice, one who is laid out six feet under, or resting nice and gently on the bottom of the lake. A dead person floats, a dead person flies, a dead person is the opposite of a person who swims, or climbs, or flails around, or plods along, he doesn't flail around in order to fly, but flies without making any movement, he has the ground alone to support him and stop him from falling. But in space, for example, a person could fly without any support at all, even dead—that would be the real deal. Given that, he would find it quite in order that a dead man were not buried but left to fly about with arms outstretched.

"Swimmers are naïve. I start my morning by marvelling at their naivety. It's then that I think over all the things that are glaringly obvious. I say to myself 'pit lake', and I have to laugh. I say to myself 'guard', and again I have to laugh. I say to myself 'I'm the pit lake guard,' and my good humour is boundless, and my despair is boundless. Then the motor cars arrive, drive round the lake in

search of a shaded spot, a good, the ideal parking spot, and you can hear the squabbling drifting over from the motor cars, because there's always someone who knows best which way the sun is moving, which way the shadows are going, there's always someone who hopes there's a better, more pleasant stretch of shore than where they happen to be. The fun starts when they get ready to go. Inexperienced visitors to the pit lake try to bring unexpected objects to the lakeshore. There's no end of chairs, dining tables, even planks and iron framework intended for a jetty, that end up slipping down the steep pebbly banks to vanish forever in the lake. Cooler bags, beer crates, bicycles and prams, wheelchairs, iron bedsteads and drums of cable. Sometimes even the cars themselves. The people then either flee from the ravenous lakeshore and never come back, or else they adapt and do come back, but this time with next-to-no equipment. Their arrival may be joyous, packed with the promise of self-oblivion; it may be cantankerous, nothing but fidgeting around, wriggling, flailing, and swinging of legs, their departure, on the other hand, more often than not a silent floating, a motionless rocking on the bottom of the lake or in a tin casket in a stiff wagon."

In his view gravel in itself, intrinsically, is dirt, as is shown by the fact that the only thing that can be made from it is concrete, a scabby, indestructible building material. In the guard's opinion nice building materials, like timber, foliage and grass or wattle and daub, also decay nicely, unlike concrete, which when it breaks down to its component parts remains dirt, or in other words gravel. All that concrete is used to make is things like cellars, bunkers, cesspools and tower blocks, so the dirt still resides there, still hangs around in these, one way or the other. That is what visitors to the pit lake stumble upon, that dirt, here, among the ugly gravel chips, this glacial detritus which can only have ended up here because it was spat out by the hill. But even that is not putrid enough for the human race.

All the rest of the world's rubbish continues to clog the pit lake, with the mine owners tossing away snapped conveyor belts, broken buckets, oil drums and gas cylinders, bolts, wrenches, boots and overalls, then the unserviceable mining machinery itself. Finally, it was only natural that people, delighted to have an unexpected new hole at their disposal, should bring here all conceivable kinds of waste, garbage, junk, trash and cast-offs and heave sighs of relief as they tossed it away. It was in the nature of the pit lake to tempt people to do that, because the pit was a superfluous, illogical and senseless lake, a lake where a lake was never meant to be, a lake which does not even exist, so it stands to reason that anything at all that is reckoned superfluous should get tossed into this all-devouring, non-existent hole which then proceeds to devour it all like a magic helmet that makes whoever wears it invisible.

The guard's words are interrupted by a panting of his not altogether impeccable lungs. At the end of his long and intricate sentences, which anyway,

in some kind of desperate indeterminacy, always teeter on the brink of deciding whether to loop back on their own beginning with some form of repetitive inanity, or whether to break through, with excruciating agony, the bush of thorns that blocks the way to clear statements only for them to drop to their knees, exhausted and panting, at the end of a completed thought—anyway, at the end of his sentences he runs out of breath, his face turns purple and he is gasping for air. Meanwhile he plays with a blue plastic penknife, the blue plastic handle of which must once have been shaped like a fish, but by now only the scales remain of that. At some point in the penknife's history crops up a kid who systematically pared the fish shape down to the point of its being unrecognisable. Perhaps other boys had made fun of him for the fish shape of the penknife, and maybe he considered that a blue, fish-shaped plastic handle detracted from the penknife's seriousness. You can't threaten anyone with a fish-shaped penknife—that may well have been the ultimate conclusion. The guard opens the penknife, scratches along the palm of his left hand, then closes the penknife. This is his rubbish-tip penknife; he has another knife as well, which is a somewhat more solid affair, having a wooden handle and brass rivets. That too is from a rubbish-tip, only another, older rubbish-tip, maybe from another era, though I simply don't know, he has not yet even so much as hinted at it.

There are some objects about whose source he remains stubbornly close-lipped. His clothes are as those of a village teacher who got so drunk he couldn't totter home and woke up in a ditch somewhere unknown to him; the names of children on the register and the class sizes rattled about his brain, so in desperation he yells out the names down in the ditch, gives a written warning on conduct, and threatens them all with a visit from the headmaster. But his jacket is still a jacket, the waistcoat still a waistcoat, the shirt—a shirt, and the trousers—trousers: these are not items that are ever cast off of their own accord, but by some slow chemistry they become fused to each other. Added to this in winter there is an overcoat from the rubbish tip, a lambskin cap with ear flaps, and tracksuit bottoms under the trousers. Then the 'GUARD' badge would be stuck on the coat: Irma would stitch it on.

The edge of the road is overgrown with weeds, the tiny, unidentifiable kind of weed that is on the bare edge of existence. All the way alongside stretch wisps of hair and strands of tape from video- and audiocassettes, fluttering in the breeze. Sound and what is sounding become entangled in one another. For a while the guard had collected the tapes aimlessly, the rustling piles standing around in boxes. He had tried to use the thicker ones as curtains, but that did not work too well: mosquitoes and flies found it easy to get past, and the draught ripped off and scattered the tapes around the room. Until they were ripped off, their fluttering was creepily quiet, sounding no louder than pins being dropped from a great height. Or when someone at a nearby table quietly licks their lips. He had therefore left off collecting more tapes, but he did not

discard the stock he already had but crammed it into one big box and stashed it away, because he was not keen to see work going to waste. Later on he hit on the sort of idea that only autumn can bring on, when the roads are softened by rain that goes on for days on end, doors and windows swell in their frames, and bedclothes become damp, as though someone had died in them not long before. The guard looked in the storeroom for the box in which he was keeping the audiocassettes. A few years before someone had strewn several sacks of tapes around on the rubbish tip, and the guard had picked up the flashier ones, like he normally picked up anything that caught his eye for some reason, not that the collecting had any specific aim, and he did not use it to swap or use the things at all, he simply felt that he could not leave this or that thing just lying around on the ground. As a result, over time specimens of just about every kind of object that people use and throw away had gradually accumulated in his storeroom, including, among other things, tape recorders, televisions, wirelesses and loudspeakers, cameras, films and photograph albums, but not forgetting a saddle and toy electric train, vibrators, hand grenades and a mandolin, to say nothing of wigs, tins of shoe polish, a sewing machine, bandages, capsules of fortifying medicine and an almost complete puppet theatre. It seemed self-evident that if the guard were not collecting all these things for any profit-making purpose, then it was because through them he was seeking a link to his past, and to those who had played a part in that past, which and who certainly had existed, except that when I put that idea to him he responded that if he were to seek a link to his past, he would simply go back home, which as far as he was aware he was open to do any time he chose, but to the best of his knowledge he was never going to do.

All the same, something can move in time, even if it is only to force out of the accumulated objects something that resembles a use, because one rainy day he had set about disembowelling one of the cassettes; he had thrown away the tape and spooled onto the reel one of the found tapes that previously had fluttered and rustled and slobbered in the window as a curtain. There was also a working tape recorder, including wires and batteries, so he inserted the cassette and waited excitedly to see what would happen now, the first time he had used anything from his collection. At first all he heard from the cassette was hissing, popping, crackling and pattering, but nevertheless he had the impression these noises differed from the sounds of mechanical damage, as if the cassette itself, by definition, contained a recording that had frozen the sounds of a broken cassette playing on a broken tape recorder. On a second and third hearing he noticed repetitions, heard the space in which the noises were situated, distinguished metallic and dull, rubbing and knocking noises, near and distant sounds, high and low sounds. When he switched the tape recorder off the house fell empty, as though someone, a loved being, had suddenly departed. Realising that the tape recorder that he was using to listen

to the cassette was one of the crummiest in his collection, he dug out another one, along with amplifier and loudspeakers. The improved sound quality made it possible for him to discover that behind the sounds he had so far been able to identify were dozens of sounds that had previously been unidentifiable. The sounds of a door slamming, a window squeaking, a cat padding, lapping, the wind blowing, a distant car noise, water gurgling, the distant squeals of a group of tramping school children, breathing, now stronger, now weaker, and soft, shuffling steps. It sounded as if a tape recorder, somewhere, sometime, had been left running accidentally, or on purpose, and the cassette tape had registered everything that happened in the house: just enough for it to be audible and just enough for it to be impossible to tell anything about the exact significance of the noises. Incorporeal, colourless cats had leapt around in the guard's room and lapped up invisible milk; distant windows and doors opened and shut; and among these was someone who was quietly breathing as they moved to and fro in the house; and every half hour a squealing group of schoolchildren tramped in front of the house, as if the Pied Piper of Hamelin were letting them go back from time to time.

In the autumn the guard had lived in that repeating half hour, in the infinitely extended half hour of another time and another place. He not only came to realise that he was no longer alone, but he discovered the possibility of infinitely multiplying his own place and time, and out of that, building on the noises of that strange house, of filling his own house with thousands of copies of himself, and in order to have his every footstep accompanied by a whole army of clones, and to keep watch, he brought out another tape recorder, put in a cassette, then switched on the one on which the sounds of the unknown time were recorded, and, setting the new tape recorder to record, went about his normal day-to-day chores in the house. Listening to the resulting cassette, on which, alongside or, to be more accurate, in between, on top of and underneath, sometimes right in the background of the noises of the other cassette, the half hour of his own house and time was also audible, brought some unexpected surprises. There were times when the stranger's and his own steps intersected, other times when they overlapped each other, with one of them opening a window, the other one closing a door; one of them stepping out into the garden, the other pouring out milk for the cat; one of them drawing the curtains, the other leafing through a book; one of them sighing, the other flopping down on a chair—all as if, like old acquaintances, each was doing what they had to do, and it was almost as if one could hear, from time to time, moments of interlocking. At other times it had seemed to the guard, who was listening to the tape in the rainy season of autumn, that there was a kind of tension in the steps, nervousness, anger and rancour, or sometimes forgiveness and atonement, at other times despair and horror. There were times when the steps veritably hounded one another. It was hard to identify the steps that were audible on the cassette as his own steps, as

if he had not been carrying out his normal day-to-day chores, but they were adjusting to the invisible other. He no longer recognised himself in the noises that he himself had produced; in the sounds on the cassette there were two strangers fumbling about.

He then set up a fresh cassette to record, and on this recording there were now three of them moving around the house, and after that another cassette, by which time it was in quadruplicate, with four cats lapping, a mansion's worth of windows opening, and so many children squealing outside on the street it sounded like everyone who had been carried off by the Black Death in the Middle Ages had come back to life. On the last recording thousands of footsteps were to be heard, with panting, sighs, throat-clearing, stomach-rumbling, a cracking of joints, as if a chaotic procession were milling aimlessly around a mysterious centre, as if someone had lowered the microphone into the underworld—an underworld in which everyone was identical and they were all adjusting their footsteps to an invisible stranger, and continuous heavy rain was falling in torrents on the aimlessly thronging crowd.

The guard spent weeks on this during the rainy season of autumn, recording a new cassette every day, and as he listened again and again to the marching clamour of the daily growing host of himself he became increasingly convinced that in among the steps of the stranger on the very first cassette and his own subsequently recorded steps were mixed ever-newer steps of a stranger from an unknown source. There were sounds too that, try as he might, he was no longer able to identify, sounds that had certainly not been created by him, knocking sounds that could never have arisen in his house. It was as if through the intermeshing of times, the daily half-hours, it was not the same half-hours that could be heard back but, somehow or other, unknown half-hours that had slipped in among them from other, unknown places. Distant waterfalls roared, thunder rumbled, horse, flocks, villages and forests clamoured, and thousands of conversations were compressed into a single, monumental fizzling. He heard an entire world in the loudspeakers in which, condensed into a half-hour, whole decades passed, whole peoples, villages and cities bustled, died and were buried, peace was concluded and war declared anew. At other times he listened through the cassette in a more disenchanted mood, and then the only noise he heard was much like the crackle of flames.

"Anyone who wants to bathe, that is, to drown, has to come along this path," the guard says. He has no cap, no stick, no uniform, just a scrap of cloth tacked onto his chest on which the word 'GUARD' is written in felt-tipped pen. "It fades in the sun every summer. I have to write 'GUARD' again every spring. Last year I still had a green felt-tip, now there's only blue. I preferred the green. More official-looking."

He cannot leave the lake unguarded. Everything so easily becomes forsaken. He knows what he is talking about, says the guard, "I know what I'm

talking about. There are times when I lounge about at home the whole day long, running my eyes over my objects. I look at the rubbish-tip trousers, my trousers on the chair, with the concertinaed creases at the calves, the spatters of mud on the legs, the pockets shiny with grease, but if I look long enough, the trousers—though it could just as well be the shirt, the rubbish-tip shirt, or the rubbish-tip jacket, wellington boots, whatever—they slowly become detached from me, the link which bound them to me, slender as it is, crumbles. In time, even the feeling that I am looking at a pair of trousers disappears. I begin not to understand the word 'trousers', as though it were being said in a foreign language, or I had dreamed up a strange word that I don't understand when I wake up." The by now foreign word 'trousers' then also itself sinks into the depths and remains hovering there, a strange, ungainly object, an agglomeration of creases, shiny patches, spatters of mud, strands of material, stitching. Then these too vanish, creases, shiny patches and stitching, it all shrinks and is shed like mud from the grips on a boot-sole, but even so something is still left that cannot be further disintegrated. Perhaps just the sight itself, and yet also something else, stuck to it, entwined in it, a parasitic bindweed, an exotic that feeds on the remains of defunct names. Like when the flesh of a carcass has gone and only the bones are left.

"If I lie down long enough at home, I forget to speak, forget to think when speaking, and in the same way as I can no longer imagine 'trousers', sooner or later I shall be unable to imagine 'GUARD' and I shall be left alone with the exotic twining around me and slowly devouring me, eating its way into me, like an earthworm in the ground. I have named the monster the Great Constrictor, and I shall do my best to forget its name, to insist on permanently forgetting it until I peel it off things, until it relaxes its grip. That carrion-eater is entwined around everything that surrounds me," says the guard.

Long weeks pass by like that, with him feeling himself to be a stranger. He does not feel himself to be a stranger in the way that he did at first, when he came here, not with the happy voracity of a stranger getting to know his new surroundings, but also not the strangeness of an exile or a prisoner; it is an immovable strangeness, although of course it does sometimes fade. If it fades, he feels that he is at home, which is to say bad, says the guard.

Nowhere had he ever felt so bad as he had at home. He had a neighbour, Stonecastle by name, a rabbit breeder. Now Stonecastle was fairly hard-working, and accordingly he was a fairly affluent breeder of rabbits, though affluence is not exactly the first thing that would have come to mind on looking at him, because the expression on his face seemed to have been fashioned to deliberately scare kids, sort of typically tragic. This Stonecastle was obsessed with the idea of being at home. He was not particularly interested in his rabbits: he would go into the back garden to feed them four or five times a day, but then he would hurry back, practically at a run, to the house. The garden did

not interest him either: he would mow the lawn, prune the bushes, then run. Nor the garden shed: he would sharpen a knife, repair his drill, knock together a rabbit hutch, then dash back to the house. And what did he do in the house? Nothing. He was at home. He was at home, and he would sit in the kitchen looking at his wife, whom he was likewise not particularly interested in, or only insofar as she too was a part of home; he sat and he was happy. Happy about what, you ask? About being at home. About not being abroad. Abroad started in the garden, with the rabbits standing, or rather, proliferating, on the boundary, but beyond the rabbits there yawned only continents, oceans and expanding universe of iron-fisted, scary, deadly lethal abroad, where Stonecastle nevertheless had to venture every now and then. It was not that Stonecastle was afraid of the outside world, just that he loathed it, disdained and despised it. "That stink again!" the guard heard every morning when Stonecastle stepped out of the front door of his home and sniffed the outside world. "Give me a handkerchief, would you, love!"

The rabbit breeder would clutch to his nose a handkerchief smelling of home before, cursing and choking, he braved the expanding universe. He would press on straight as an arrow, hardly even looking up, knocking aside anyone coming the other way, kicking objects that were lying on the ground, spitting at any barking dogs that were nursing their grudges behind fences, snarling at infants snoozing in perambulators. He battered passers-by in the calf with his briefcase, the edges of which were reinforced with steel plates, and on buses he would quite deliberately drop it onto the foot of any passenger seated next to him, or else allow it to be shaken off the luggage rack onto the victim's head. From time to time, he managed to cause quite spectacular head injuries by these means. He would never apologise, or even grin maliciously: his expression would remain tragic throughout, which, under the circumstances, might even have been interpreted as offering an apology. He turned a deaf ear to all who inveighed against him and sniffed at the air of home from his handkerchief, says the guard.

He found it most bearable when he was in his van, making deliveries of his rabbits. The name Stonecastle was painted onto the enclosed sides of the vehicle, with the ends of the letters 't' and 'l' being formed into a pair of bunny-rabbit ears, though just to be sure under his name it also read 'rabbit breeder', and under that was a plump, blue rabbit. Stonecastle left nothing to chance. In the van, in the driver's compartment of which, it goes without saying, he locked in the aroma of home, he drove around with the windows tightly wound up, whatever the weather, to carry his jack-rabbits to service (by all reports at lightning speed). Wherever it went the van would leave behind a dense, only slowly dispersing cloud of stink and suffocation.

It would have been an elegantly self-revelatory act of fortune had a fateful blow met Stonecastle somewhere in the outside world, but that was not what

happened, says the guard, or not quite. The trouble occurred at the boundary, on the border. One morning in autumn the guard had woken up to the sound of odd noises: rummaging, puffing, scraping and soft, rhythmical popping, rather like the sound unscored sweet chestnuts make when they burst in the oven. He opened the curtains to be presented with a dreamlike scene: in the misty garden, as far as he could see, right up to the strip of trees running along the back of the gardens, Stonecastle's plump, oddly hued rabbits, intoxicated with their freedom, were capering around. The breeder himself, in flannel pyjamas, was rushing around from one to another, collecting them in a big sack, but the rabbits, alive to the chance that this would never recur again, had nibbled their way out of the sack to be reborn and scatter to the four winds. All Stonecastle could do, in the end, was kick up in the air any rabbit that he managed to catch: the sound of the lifeless carcasses hitting the ground was the source of the sound of roast chestnuts popping.

That was how Stonecastle was reduced to beggary, although he was not broken entirely by the seemingly senseless revenge of the rabbits' silent rebellion. Since the rabbits were really and truly, to tell God's honest truth, not of the slightest interest to him, he did not become one of the living dead as, despite everything, his home was still his, and no drastic change overcame him in the familiar smell of home. At least now there was no reason at all to force him to move, so he could give himself up completely to enjoying round-the-clock existence at home. His ashen, flabby features could sometimes be seen behind the windows, casting not so much as a side-glance at the outside world. Whenever a door or window opened in the house, he would yell out a demand that it be closed instantly, and until that was done he would retreat to a more distant room, says the guard. Through the open window there billowed a sickening home smell, a home stink, a home stench.

But Stonecastle was not the only example he might mention; indeed, it was not very sporting of him to have trotted out the unfortunate case of the rabbit breeder, because there were plenty of others he could have brought up. Himself, for example, himself when he was a boy, says the guard, "myself when I was a boy, the way I would suffocate in the strange smells of strange houses. I would no sooner make friends than the friendship would be severed the moment I stepped into a strange house; I would have to turn back, retching on account of the strange smell, the smell of home. I was simply not in a position to accept friendly invitations, which is what I longed for more than anything else, it was fruitless for me to set off with a biscuit tin of Matchbox toys tucked under one arm, when all the way it was perfectly clear that the moment I stepped into the home of the person who had invited me I would be forced to turn round at once and, without being able to supply any satisfactory explanation, with insulting speed, make off home, along with my Matchbox toys. At home I was not a whit better off than if I had been obliged to live my

life in a strange house, in a strange smell of home that one could never get used to, because our own house, my parents' house, had the same smell of home that one could never get used to; in my own heart, or rather belly, I would rather have turned tail on it instantly. Later on I was signally preoccupied with the problem of what were the components of the smell in question that I could not stand and which caused me so much unpleasantness, not to say tragedy. I tried to analyse the smell, breaking it down into the separate smells of bedclothes, the waste pipes, the pantry, the green, the toilet, the laundry basket, dust, mould, the parquet flooring, farts, feet, semen, and so on, but that didn't work. Although all those smells are present in the smell of home, even when taken together they still don't constitute the smell of home. For the smell of home, the stench of home, it is necessary for the home to display, and for them to be at home, the processes that are typical of life at home, such as salivation, picking at food, shuffling, stretching out, lazing around, pottering, fiddling and tinkering, scratching, yawning, wilting and gaping, and obviously that sets off some chemistry of a higher order which makes its presence felt in the smell. And that then putrefies into a smell of home. I despaired when I noticed that the moment I myself began to produce a smell of home, I grew disgusted with myself, and I was quite incapable of living under the same roof as myself," says the guard.

Since then he had been engaged in a systematic struggle against acquiring a smell of home, and as a result life was fairly tolerable, although the struggle called for no small amount of self-discipline. Not a minute went by without his having to exercise unremitting patience in forgetting every thought, every object that popped around him, and once he managed to forget it, along would come the next one, then the next. Objects that were not forgotten would, of necessity, lead to a feeling of being at home, and that in turn to lazing around, fiddling, picking at food, and that to the stench of home, which quite obviously carries straight on to death. He now had good practice in forgetting, though sadly there was no way of assessing its level, since there was no one against whom he could compare his proficiency, nor would it be a simple matter to find a referee for the contest who had any grasp of that sort of thing. All the same, he feels that he is able to forget things easily and had a routine down pat. Sometimes, on the better days, he was able to forget in a single operation all the furniture and fittings of his entire house, including all the bric-a-brac he had laid aside in storage. In their place was a splendid, brilliant vacuum. It was a cause for some concern that in the vacuum, in the place of the forgotten things, in smaller and larger curls and kinks in the vacated spaces, there hung the Constrictors, and it was all but impossible to forget them, but he believed that even that could be licked in the long run. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Attila Mizser

Heaven on Earth

The Astrophotography of Iván Éder

Taking heed of a suggestion by the International Astronomical Union, the United Nations declared 2009 the International Year of Astronomy, appropriately marking the four-hundredth anniversary of Galileo's first use of a telescope for his astronomical observations which first confirmed Copernican heliocentric cosmology. Thus the beginnings of modern astronomy are strongly linked to Galileo's observations of four hundred years ago.

When Galileo embarked on using a telescope, he was, in the modern sense, an amateur astronomer—he had not earlier undertaken in-depth celestial observations. Thanks to his persevering work, he soon became one of the major astronomers of his time, committed to Copernican theory. Today's amateur astronomers go through something similar when starting to use a telescope, even if the key element in their work does not seek to prove any theory. The Galileos of today wish to familiarise themselves with and experience the phenomena of the sky for their own sake, and they are fortunate enough to work with instruments Galileo and his contemporaries could not have dreamed of.

Even the most simple amateur telescope of today is a thousand times more effective than Galileo's primitive instrument was. Thanks to the increasingly perfected telescopes and the digital revolution, even amateurs are able to take astrophotos much more spectacular than those taken not too long ago by the cream of the profession using the most expensive super telescopes.

Iván Éder, 29 years old, is one of the better known Hungarian amateur astronomers, but he is known first and foremost for his outstanding astrophotos. It is no exaggaration to declare him to be the best Hungarian

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Attila Mizser

is the Secretary General of the Hungarian Astronomy Association and Head of the Budapest Polaris Observatory. As an editor of a number of publications on astronomy, he is concerned primarily with astronomy as popular science.

astrophotographer, one who fought his way with great perseverance to be counted among the acknowledged astrophotographers worldwide. And he is still at the beginning of his career.

Éder was born into a family of musicians. His father, a cellist, is a member of the Kodály String Quartet, his mother is the pianist Vera Kancsár. His grandfather was a physicist, and it may have been from him that Iván Éder inherited his interest in the natural sciences.

He graduated from the Franz Liszt Academy of Music as a percussionist but, as he says, it is almost impossible to make a living as a percussionist nowadays. He has always been attracted by astronomy, and as soon as his amateur astronomer friends offered him a job, he was more than happy to take advantage of the opportunity. Éder now works for the Budapest Telescope Store, helping customers and offering advice on instruments and, of course, has many astrophoto questions to answer as well.

His earliest memories are connected with Halley's Comet. Like most people, he has not seen it, but since it was the sensation of 1986, he heard a great deal about it at the time. He acquired his first experiences with the telescope at the Baja Observatory, where he returned annually in the summer as a regular guest of the nightly telescope programmes.

Éder was given his first telescope in 1994:

> I was dying to see the planets, but at the beginning of the year, in January–February, no planets were visible. When I first saw Jupiter and its moons, this sent cold chills right down my spine. A couple of months later seeing the Ring of Saturn was an indescribable experience to me, as was seeing the craters on the Moon and double stars: just about everything I could reach with the eye of the telescope fascinated me.

This is how he recalls sighting the Hale-Bopp Comet, three years later:

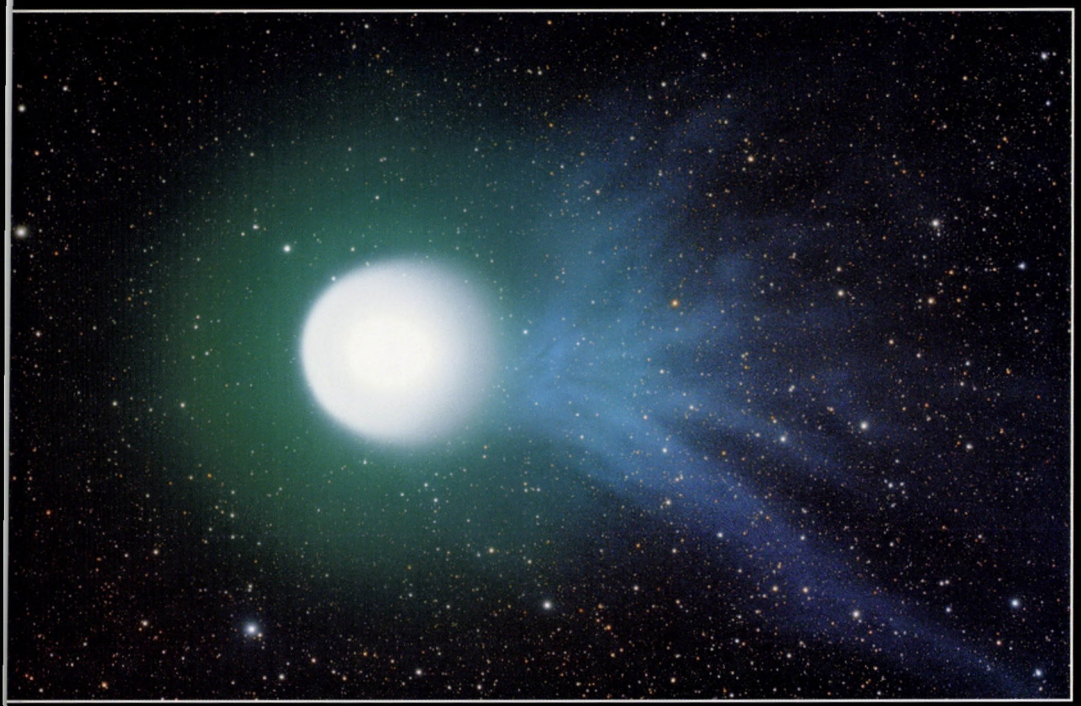
> My most memorable experience as an astronomer happened in the Börzsöny hills, during a class excursion on Nagyhideg hill. The sky was crystal clear due to a cold front; I'll never forget the sight of the comet. It was of that comet that I was able to take my first astrophoto—for lack of equipment, with a standing camera, using an objective lens.

Éder established contacts with the Hungarian Astronomy Association in 1999. This meant a huge step for him. Thanks to the new friends he made there, Éder was able to concentrate more on astrophotography. By the spring of 2000, he took his first pan shots, with the technical advantage of correcting the seeming warping of the sky so that the stars remain dot-like on the long exposure photographs. For hours on end he collected starlight in order to capture the Orion cloud (Orion Nebula) or the Pleiades.

The brightest comet of our times, Comet McNaught, photographed in evening twilight from the slopes of Hármashatárhegy, 10 January 2007. Photograph by Iván Éder.

Lunar craters from the garden. A good example of high resolution astrophotography.
Photograph by Iván Éder.

Lunar mosaic using ten frames taken with a compact digital SLR camera.
Photograph by Iván Éder.



Comet Holmes, the surprise comet of the autumn of 2007. During an unpredictable outburst it transformed from an almost visible telescopic object into a naked-eye fuzzy comet. Photograph by Iván Éder.

Centre of the Heart Nebula in Cassiopeia.
Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Flaming Star Nebula in Auriga. The star (official name: AE Aurigae) is not flaming itself, but the surrounding nebula mimics the flaming.
Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Horse Head Nebula is one of the most attractive dark nebulae in the sky. Very hard to detect visually, but an attractive object for astrophotographers. Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Andromeda Nebula is the nearest big galaxy in our neighbourhood at a distance of 2.5 million light years.
Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Pleiades, a naked-eye cluster of stars in Taurus with beautiful bluish reflection nebulae.
Photograph by Iván Éder.

The summer Milky Way over Ágasvár, Iván Éder's favourite observation site. Full of stars, full of wonders, two of them are visible in the centre of the field: Trifid and Lagoon Nebula. Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Ghost Region in Cepheus is one of Iván Éder's longest exposure pictures for which he collected starlight for ten hours on four different nights. Photograph by Iván Éder.

The Whirlpool Galaxy Messier 51 (M51, NGC 5194), one of the most conspicuous and well known spiral galaxies, is a prototype for both spiral and interactive galaxies. This galaxy was the first one where the spiral structure was discovered, in 1845, by Lord Rosse. Photograph by Iván Éder.

Not, however, satisfied with a shop-bought telescope, he went about constructing his own. Throughout the years he has progressed to build telescopes of greater efficiency and uses several telescopes for his photography. The one he favours most is a 130-mm TMB refractor; his telescope with the greatest capability is a Newton System reflector with a 300-mm lens. (In astronomy the diameter of the telescope is the most important parameter; a 300-mm objective lens can gather a considerable amount of light, crucial in particular for the observation of dim objects.)

Of all Hungarian astrophotographers, Éder's photos were published first on the Astronomy Picture of the Day website (http://antwrp.gsfc.nasa.gov/apod/astropix.html) —photos of Crescent Venus and Moon, deep-space objects and Comet Holmes.

Starting out with conventional film photography, in recent years he has turned digital. He now uses a Canon EOS digital SLR camera and claims the digital method produces more effective work while creating images of greater beauty. Most importantly, it makes it possible to capture objects considerably dimmer than film would allow. When, years ago, he photographed the M51 Whirlpool Galaxy, one of the most famous spiral galaxies in the sky, onto film with an amateur astronomer friend, they had to expose the film for 1000 minutes. With his present equipment, Éder is able to achieve the same limiting magnitude in 5 minutes—a fitting example of the advantages of digital technology.

Iván Éder lives in Budapest, where sky gazers are in great difficulty because of the amount of light pollution. He is able to capture from his garden the Moon and the planets as the sight of neither is affected by the city's light pollution. If he wants to take shots of depth objects, Éder takes his equipment and travels 100 kms to the heart of the Mátra Hills. His favourite place is Ágasvár, which stands at nearly 800 metres and whose tourist lodge serves as a base for many Hungarian amateur astronomers.

As a classical musician, Éder has little hope of earning a stable livelihood, although he occasionally performs with some of the best known Hungarian symphonic orchestras, including the Budapest Festival Orchestra and the Hungarian National Philharmonic Orchestra. As a musician, he hopes to be a member of one of the great orchestras. As a private person, he would like to start a family; and as an astrophotographer, he would like to found a sighting base of his own from which he can take better advantage of clear skies. He would also like to capture some of the celestial sights in the Southern Hemisphere, claiming that they are a great deal more exciting than those of the North. Also, he aspires to curate astrophoto exhibits in which he can reveal the beauties of the skies closer up. ❧

Centauri

Morgen and Norman

Short story

I had seen fog as it spread from tree to tree in a swampy alder thicket, and as it slowly curled around a hilltop gun placement; I had seen from above, as it lodged in the trough of a valley far below, and as it steamed from north to south on a mountain pass; seen it as it layered on the asphalt road on my way homewards; I had also seen fog descending and lifting within just minutes, as well as choking smog that did not clear for weeks; on the shore of the Simpson Straits, I have stood in fog so thick that I could see only as far as the tip of my nose. But never before, anywhere, had I seen anything as dense as the fog inside me that summer.

By July I was simply convinced that Linna had left me—just like that, tough titties, that's the ball game, over and out, cut, basta! I couldn't imagine why she wouldn't come, did she want to kill me? I could think of nothing else. A heat-wave was raging outside, the very walls of the houses sweaty, the trees wilting, the roofs foaming, window shutters melting, blades of grass, flies and leaves sticking to each other. The sky was bubbling up into blisters, and cancerous forests were gasping for air, but I was shivering, like someone stranded on an ice field in the Beaufort Sea. A brief but violent storm every afternoon, towards four o'clock, would give the landscape some respite from the melting. Sometimes gale-force winds brought jagged forks of lightning. This would always be followed, every damned day, by a tranquil, tepid, steaming twilight. Shuddering with cold, I would watch as lizards basked amid the drying spikes of lavender.

I have no idea how long I did not eat. In any event, when I had given no sign of life by the middle of July my mother dropped by. She happened to be passing that

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Centauri

is a writer who has been publishing short stories, essays and photographs for the last three years in various literary magazines, and whose identity is unknown to this day. He/she has published two volumes of short stories, Pátosz a káoszban *(Pathos in Chaos, 2007) and* Kék angyal *(Blue Angel, 2008). His/her work is reviewed by László Márton on pp. 119–125 of this issue.*

way and peeked in, just in case I was at home, you never knew, Morgen being so dumb. I had been feeling chilled and was sleeping. Mother came to a standstill among the weeds that were pushing up by the front gate, the look on her face so horror-struck that it took me long seconds to recognise her. When I finally snapped to and realised that the frightening stranger who was disrupting my shivering was Mother, all I asked was, "What do you want?" Mother responded with a question of her own: "Have you any idea what you look like?... When did you last eat anything?" I was unable to answer. Up until that point, it had not entered my mind that I was not eating. I never felt hungry; just freezing. Mother, in her desperation, said that it was not normal, one could even die of it, but in that case it would be no good my saying it was her fault. I reassured her that as far as *that* was concerned, it wasn't.

I waited for Linna for three months. It wasn't the way one usually waits, though: I did nothing else, just waited, for almost a hundred days. I seemed to recall that we might even have discussed a time when she would come. At the beginning of July—the "agreed point in time"—I sat for three days and three nights without sleep, barely moving, by the window behind closed shutters, my constituent particles were disintegrating at even the slightest noise. For three days cars came and went; storms came and went, the twilights, evenings, swallows, hedgehogs and beetles; a wind rattled the doors of the half-finished house; a bucket of plaster that had been left dangling on a rope, pulled halfway between the ground and the upstairs floor, swung back and forth like a pendulum; the foliage of the magnolia rustled, the planks by the entrance creaked; things would plop down from the trees every now and then—but no Linna. Through a combination of despair and sleeplessness, I must have lost my mind. To start with there were appalling temptations; plans, brainwaves, tormenting urges, and in the end, apparitions: flame-red figures sitting on the trees, on the furniture, the walls—I haven't seen anything so beautiful since! They were wonderful: alluring, benign, pleasant and bright red! Most certainly they came, though admittedly not so much to me as for me. They waved. They understood everything—at last someone who did!—so they said not a word, just swarmed across the room, the yard, the tree branches; their tiny legs dangled from the loose gutter, lolled about in clumps on the terrace; there were places where they were scattered casually in a row on the lawn, like a necklace string of inwardly glowing rubies, popping up now here, now there from a molehill or from behind a tree trunk; they teemed like ants in nooks and crannies, and hardly any larger, whereas in another place, in the gateway, would stand a lofty figure, over sixty feet high, with shorter ones seated on his shoulders, and on them in turn, pocket demons of some sort! And ever more of them were pouring and climbing out from behind the lapels, the belt, the mouth, the nose, every one of them most agreeable, attractive and good-looking. Good-humoured. And every one of them, big or small, lazing about or swarming together, were looking at me and beckoning with a slow, unctuous

gesture: "Come! Come now! Don't wait and don't fall asleep! Come along with us!" I was well aware that they were the angels of demise, but who would have credited that the cul-de-sac of death was so exquisite, so inviting, so reassuring and salutary! So pleasantly scary that I forgot to die and simply passed out.

Nobody inquired after me until the end of August. My half-sister and half-brother, Selma and Norman, did not so much as cross my thoughts; Linna was all I had on my mind. Mother came over on two occasions at the end of the month; she brought something to eat, but I could barely get a bite down. Chewing was painful, swallowing was sheer torture. She threatened to have me locked up in the loony bin if I didn't eat. So I threatened her back that there would be hell to pay when I got out. She did not come after that.

Crazy as I was, I would take the nobly simple way out and croak there—that is, if I had been allowed. During the night of September 4th, though, I dreamed that I was thinking of Norman, whom I couldn't abide; indeed, he had always repelled me: the very sight of him, his voice, his smell—everything that was part of him. I dreamed that I was eating supper with Mother. We were up to the waist in tepid mushy peas, sitting like two old-age pensioners in a thermal bath. The table top was clean, however: although the corners were dipping into the soup, the table-cloth was a crisp white. There was a fine dinner service of Meissen china, with silver spoons. In the centre was a samovar, a ladle resting on a dinner plate, which we used from time to time to scoop up from the thick pulp from the room. We ladled it out and ate in leisurely fashion, kept on ladling it out and eating, over and over again; we were not hungry, but we did not get our fill either. When I managed to dribble some of the mush onto the tablecloth, Mother, in best devotional manner, declared under her breath, "Easy now, Morgen!" and that inflection brought Norman to mind. Not much later, Mother—now in a breezy, worldly tone of voice—asked me to go and pay Norman a visit in hospital tomorrow, and I was to take a change of clean clothes and oranges, ask him how he was, and had he been told anything yet about the operation. Grudgingly as always, I took note of Mother's wishes, and the next day I got dressed, stowed into a bag the parcel for Norman and Mother's letter to the doctor who was treating him, and got on the bus. I spent a tedious half-day being jolted around, already making plans for the journey back: what I would do afterwards: where I would go to hide away so as not to meet up with Mother or Norman for months. In all honesty, I would rather not go in to see him, just give the parcel to the nurses: "There you are! These are his clothes and some oranges. Give him one whenever you feel like it! This is Mother's letter for the doctor! He's all right, isn't he? (who was going to tell me, of all people, that it was something serious?) Great! Bye-bye! Then back out the door, off to the bus stop. God forbid I should ever see the place again! Toddlers tottering around, wheelchairs, wooden crutches leaning on the loo door, and the stink that assailed my nose—the smell of the sort of medicines that are doled out five times daily to the incurably sick.

A familiar nurse duly came, which pleased me greatly. It all went off smoothly: I handed her the parcel and the letter, just as I had foreseen on the bus, and I was already striding towards the exit when I sensed an odd pull and a powerful feeling of unease, and the door to one of the wards was pushed open by a draught just as I was passing. Norman was sitting up in bed opposite the door, perched in what was a failed attempt to cross his legs, staring at me as never before. He was radiating utter amazement and humiliating love. A strong, steady draught was blowing from his direction; my hair was ruffled and my T-shirt fluttered. It slowly gathered strength till I had to lean forwards in order not to be blown down. Then there came a moment—I stood for a long time in the diabolically strong draught—when I did not feel just the love in it; not just the longing for those who are healthy, do not shit their pants, can read and write and play in the playground, tug girls' pigtails and skirts, but an outpouring of intelligence, of complete, total, absolutely solitary self-consciousness. A sense that Norman was not at all stupid, just different! And he was starving and sinking fast! Yes, he would die of starvation within hours, because he could never get down a morsel of what the others were given more or less regularly, if only as scraps. And not only did he sense that he had never received any of that, but he knew it as well, and that was a cruel dilemma!

I was so sorry for him that I felt compelled to go in and look at him with love and forgiveness, and as I stood there, quite close to him, I couldn't help smoothing down the hair on his shaggy head, whereupon he fiercely grabbed on to my arm, almost falling off the bed as he pressed his arm on the bars, and in my dream I then saw something that no one had ever seen before: Norman's eyes were flooded with tears! He was not crying, though, just weeping silently, much like those wanly smiling saints in altar-pieces in country churches. But he held on to me; he resuscitated me, instilled and breathed life back into me, while I just stood there and knew very distinctly that I was happy. Norman was, too, and it needed only the two of us—no one else, incredible though that sounds!

I had slept no more than a few hours when I started up at around three-thirty in the morning. The yard was pitch black, the house freezing. I was cold; the first fog of autumn had descended and the apples were falling: I could hear the dull thuds out in the dark. I sat numbly, drained in sweat, emaciated, sober; I felt an intolerable sense of shame and unease; first Linna would come to mind, then Norman. When had I last seen him? Two months ago? Four months? Good Lord! It must have been at least a year and a half! That's right, I hadn't so much as gone his way in a year and a half, because I had either been at college or at Linna's place—anywhere else, so long as I did not have to think of him. To no avail, though! Now there had been this dream; there was no avoiding him any longer! A year and a half. It seemed most unlikely that Norman even remembered me at all, or kept me in mind, even if only in his own peculiar way, with there being a place for me somewhere within what, for

him, was a totally incomprehensible concept of space/world/cosmos—for me, his elder brother, his half-bother. Still, what if ...?

It had not yet gone four o'clock when I was standing under the shower, the water ice-cold, and I felt happy. I would go to see Norman, I thought to myself; he'll not be figuring on that! No doubt it would work out as in the dream. And as I cast my mind back to him, he no longer seemed quite so obnoxious. I could barely wait for the first bus to set off. What I felt, for the very first time, was that Norman was a caged wild beast, but worthy of respect, who could not help it if he was still filling his pants every so often, even now. More than that, even his cage seemed worthy of respect, because who had ever seen so many bars before? And has to be guarded, locked away from me, like that, under seven seals, with moats, electrified fences, steel spikes and fortress walls! There was no telling who he was, but he was not just anybody! Because Norman could pride himself on having an arsenal of illnesses such as was unrivalled even in the sort of clinics that he had been trailed around, like a blood-stained sword, in recent years. Where he had been the first patient whom they brought trainee medics round to see so they might learn a lot fast!

I made my way along the dark streets, rhythmically and mechanically like a sleepwalker; like someone who was being pulled along on a rope, and I know what that is like! Because of course Norman had also been through that: he had become a veritable Job of medical complaints by the time he reached adolescence. The early symptoms of every conceivable mental illness and every known childhood disease could be ascertained on him, from phimosis to spots that would turn into boils, so as it was we were not surprised that he would get up at night and regularly go missing. My schoolmates were sceptical. They said that sleepwalking was something that only happened in films. They were right too, at least to the extent that Norman did not do things like balancing on roofs, and he did not do it just at full moon, nor did he hold his arms up before him, but, that apart, everything chimed with him being a sleepwalker. He too was unaware of himself doing what he did, and he too would accomplish the strangest things: he would empty a whole wardrobe, widdle in the refrigerator, untie from the kitchen wall a string of at least a hundred heads of garlic, and by the time we noticed he would have chopped the lot up; or else he would wander over to our neighbour's, saunter down the hall all the way to the bedroom and slip into bed between the sixty-four-year-old retired boxer and his fat wife. When the ageing bruiser woke up, switched on the bedside lamp and saw Norman, an inane grin on his mug, just about to embrace the wife, the heavyweight pensioner jumped up, lifted Norman by his shoulders off the bed, or so I visualise it, and slapped him to the floor. As things were, he hated Norman anyway; there was more than one occasion on which he relieved his bowels on their doormat. At first they thought it was the poodle from the ground floor, but it later came out that Norman was the culprit, and as you can imagine our goofball's standing in the popularity stakes had sunk

to zero—and now this! Anyway, he was slammed hard to the ground. All that we heard from outside in the corridor, by way of the open front door, was someone shouting out, "You little sod!" and a groan (the floor shook as well), followed a little bit later by Norman's death rattle. By then we were looking for him. We could see that our front door was open, in just the same way as the bruiser's front door was open, so it was natural to think that the hapless kid had got embroiled in something there. We went in after him, and when we reached the old coots' bedroom we could see the old buzzard was holding Norman with his right hand by the pyjama collar and slapping him non-stop with the left, slap-bang! slap-bang! "You little sod!", first one way, then the other, a slap followed by a back hand, laying out the frighteningly heavy clouts as mechanically as if he too were on automatic pilot. A pool of blood was being spattered from Norman's mouth, and by the time we managed to free him the poor little blighter was gaping like a bream that has just been reeled ashore, but instead of spitting out the blood he kept swallowing, it was no use us pleading him to open his mouth (we were afraid he was going to choke): he just kept on swallowing, swallowing, right to the last drop! He gazed at us horror-stricken, and even though he was a complete nitwit, who only ever uttered a word once in a blue moon, this time he showed very clearly that he was flabbergasted. He had not been in possession of his wits when he had gone over, but later on he was well aware of what was going on, that for some unaccountable reason he had woken up in a strange bed, and the "old neighbour next door" was beating him up within an inch of his life. There were rough evenings. When the business took a firm hold with Norman, we could no longer trust that he would grow out of it; we realised that if we did nothing the nightmare would become a fixture, like his other obsessions. Mother issued the injunction that I was to stay awake at night; she would even be prepared to buy me a walkman if it would help me keep watch: let me listen to a bit of music, though what would please her most of all was if I used the time to learn some German vocabulary, but in the end that was not so important, what really mattered was that when I saw Norman get out of bed, I was to wake him up! The first night nothing happened. The second night I fell asleep. On the third I saw Norman sit up like an automaton, stay like that for a few seconds, then get up and set off towards the French window that led to the balcony, which meant towards my own bed, which was pulled over in front of it every evening, ever since the time he had got onto the balcony and almost fallen off it. I called out to him, but he did not react and just set off towards me with long, slow, strides. "Got you this time!" I thought to myself, having by now also prepared myself mentally to dish out the odd punch to him, if necessary and if the occasion should arise. This was one time when Mother would overlook it! When Norman had reached just an arm's length away I tried to stop him: this far and no further! But sickly, weedy Norman, who was a good head and a half shorter than me, was alarmingly strong, and he pushed me over. Taking advantage of my disarray, Norman carried on, tripping on

my legs and falling over me, slap into the double glazing of the French window, gashing himself all over to the sound of an almighty crash! The next moment an ice-cold gust of air whistled into the room, whisking the curtains up to the ceiling; Mother rushed in like a whirling dervish and switched on the light. I was hoping I had also cut myself, but what seemed certain was that Norman would be absolutely covered in blood, if he was anywhere true to form. Instead, I was obliged to conclude that not even a sliver of glass had landed on me, let alone any injury. A look of blue murder was swirling in Mother's eyes. She sprang over to me, yelled at me, and with the first fair-sized piece of glass that came to hand she stabbed at my legs, meanwhile cutting the palm of her hand, of course, on the upper edge of her improvised dagger, which was when she really started yelling and then fetched me two such massive wallops with the now freshly bloodied palm of her hand that I fell off the bed. In the end, we untangled Norman from the window. He had to be given thirty-three stitches, Mother had seven in her hand, and I had twenty-one stitches in my thigh.

Subsequently we put down a basin of water beside Norman's bed, and whenever he stepped in that on getting up he would automatically lie back down and carry on sleeping. After a few weeks, we took the basin away, and Norman would lie back down again even without that. Against that, though, his unprecedented puberty arrived! He grew phenomenally muscular, but instead of stringing out he became squat, like a shrunken Quasimodo double! A thick yeti fleece grew on him, his face lost its babyish features, and he struck one as being in his thirties at least, stooped from too much sitting, yet astoundingly strong. On top of everything else, one fine day Mother discovered that his nipples were swollen. Lest he somehow turn into some kind of female King Kong, she shot him in to see some medical consultants to whom both she and Norman were well known. They did not turn a hair. They diagnosed testicular oojamahflip as well as phimosis, but nothing more than that. They advised that Norman's nipples should have poultices put on them every day, and that would bring his breasts down. The only trouble was that this was not as simple as it sounds, because that dork Norman, thick-skinned though he normally was, suddenly became unexpectedly shy, almost bashful as any young girl, so that each time it took literally hours to persuade him. There was no chance of assailing him, of trying to force it on him, because then he would have just picked up whatever was closest to hand and hurled it to the ground or through the window. That led to our being reported to the police on one occasion, when he barely missed hitting someone with a reading lamp. When the nipple thing eventually sorted itself out, though, Norman switched to endless masturbation which I found unspeakably awful because at the time we still shared a room, and his shyness—unfortunately for us—had been overcome. He did not even try to hide what he was doing: he just lounged around on the bed and, for hours at a time, he would jerk off, groan, sigh longingly, and let out a murmur of satisfaction. Mother advised me to pay no attention and concentrate on expanding

my German vocabulary. Despite that, I saw him pop his cork more than once, his semen spraying out in sci-fi jets that covered the bedclothes or any clothes that I had left out on the chair. At first this mostly took place in the evening, though later on he would also spend part of the day doing it, and there was no way of diverting him from that goal once he had got it into his head; he would growl, look menacing, even stretch out one hand, to grab us or anything that he might chuck out of the window, while carrying on doggedly slaking the bacon with the other. Later on in the hospital, where he had been admitted with a stomach complaint, he managed to all but rape a young girl, and the nurses absolutely loathed him, because he would grab them (something at which he proved to be very adroit), and by the time they could react he would be groping under their uniform. It got to the point that it was seriously considered whether to castrate him, but then—who would have guessed it?—his libido let up and he became withdrawn. Could he have got wind that if things were to carry on like they had, then it would end in tears? Could it be that he was not quite as stupid as he seemed?

A year and a half later, to encourage his mobility, he was sent to a rehabilitation centre, but events soon veered off in a completely different direction. It turned out that Norman's heart was faltering. He had grown into a big lump of muscle, weighing over 180 pounds, but he was barely any taller than many small teenagers; his heart was increasingly unable to cope with the mismatch. So, he was transferred to a cardiac centre, where it became clear there was every chance that Norman would soon end his ignominious and insalubrious earthly passage, thanks to a malignancy of the thyroid gland. Only after a nerve-racking delay could a clinic be found where they were able to treat simultaneously all the maladies, each of which was serious in its own right. They had hardly made a start on radiotherapy when he was found to have leukaemia as well as everything else. The wonder was that he was still alive! I knew all the details, because Mother would always relay them, not just to me but to anyone, anywhere she happened to be; maybe that was her way of relieving the load on her. Whatever she was asked, she would answer: "Thanks, I'm fine, it's just that...," and she would then launch into a catalogue of the latest horrors. In the end, even her best friend found her hard to take. Despite all that, Norman had dropped totally from my thoughts; I knew he existed, and that he would soon die, but as to whether that should hold any particular significance for me—that never entered my head. Maybe because Norman was a born Job, a compendium of every conceivable affliction, whether hereditary or acquired, so why would thyroid cancer be any different? Or had I just buried him prematurely, so completely banished him from my mind that he could not return even as a memory? Whatever the case, that morning I felt dreadful pangs of conscience that I had not even been taking conscious notice of Norman's being in the throes of dying—and all on account of a woman! Or was it on account of myself? But then I cheered up, as I have said, at the thought that I was now going to see him, and for the very first time in my life of my own accord.

I put a new blade in my razor, but then, after I had lathered up, I had second thoughts. Maybe he would be pleased if I, too, was stubble-chinned. I had seen a photo that Gary, our stepfather, had taken of him, not that he paid any more attention to Norman than I did, but in that snap Norman had a huge, bushy red beard. Mother claimed that he would not permit it to be cut off, though it didn't look good on him at all. The medications he was taking made him bloated, so that, what with the beard as well, made him look like a fluffy, jumbo-sized orange! But if that's how he was, what was I to do? At least I could make an effort to resemble him, if only a little bit, I reasoned, and that was when I recalled those few occasions when Norman had given a clear signal that he, in his own strange way, had some respect for me: he looked up to me and aped me. Sometimes when I was reading, he would adopt exactly the same pose, to a T, as the one I was sitting in, the only difference being that he did not have a book in his hands, though once I even caught him "reading", sitting with book in hand at my desk. I, of course, chased him away. Incidentally, he was more willing to attack anyone else but me—that is, when he got stronger and more aggressive. So, in the end I left my appearance just as hirsute and unkempt as it had become over the past three months; I was even regretting having showered. This was nonsense, it goes without saying, but then Norman was considered an off-putting presence, even if he was my half-brother. And all at once I was uncertain what line I should take with him, given that I had done nothing but reject him from the moment he was born. The hospital was bleak, white and full of iron bars, I thought to myself, so I would wear something gaudy in the hope that he would be glad to see some colour. So I dressed up in a motley collection of gear such as never before, because as a rule I wore only black or navy blue; indeed, I had quite a job finding anything coloured. I searched my pockets and gathered together all my loose change to buy some oranges, and also some spicy dry sausage, which Norman was very fond of, only Mother—for some unearthly reason—did not like him to eat it. So, I got on the bus armed with oranges and sausage, and I got there by one-thirty that afternoon.

The sunshine emanated from me! The green of the trees and the idyllic rustling of leaves on the path leading to the clinic—that was from Norman. I knew, knew so well, that I was in the best possible place! I all but flew up the staircases, skated along the spotless corridors as if on ice, and when I saw a wheelchair I decided that I would take Norman for a walk outside in the grounds, if they would permit that—right round the place. Maybe he would even speak to me, so help me! Say something about him also having a dream in which I came out to see him and taught him to speak! And how good it was like this! So simple, as if this were the natural thing between us; all at once this was going to come to pass, something would be repaired, would click into place, and from then on there could be no problems. In point of fact, it would not be a major worry even if a hundred new horrors were diagnosed in him, who cared? Not us now! The sun was shining, we would be taking a spin under

breeze-wafted maple-trees, slaloming round the spooky white trunks of the silver birches, and when we were out of sight we would scoff all the sausage! We would make up for every lost hour, make the best of every minute! Not a second would go by that we had not sucked dry!

I soon found a nurse. I introduced myself, smiled at her, and she smiled back, nicely, as if she too were on our side, a good-humoured, quiet participant in a secret conspiracy. She was pretty in a striking but staid way, I reflected, though not this time with the overpowering enthusiasm that just six months ago would have got the better of me within a trice: now it was much more as a "connoisseur". She gave me the directions and said, "Norman will be pleased!" She pointed to a nearby door. It was then that I slightly got cold feet. Everything was so nice! But what if Norman was not in the least bit pleased to see me and went into some hysterical rage? Or spat at me, as had happened more than a few times? Never mind, I thought, I am not going to be disappointed, whatever he does. I have to stay like this and not expect Norman to live up to my own hopes and ideas. What if he sees the whole thing quite differently from me? I must respect that. That was the resolve with which I went into his room.

He was on his own in the ward. Lying in bed. I think I smiled. He stared at the window, but he stretched a hand through the bars towards the door. I could see straightaway that not only did he have no beard, he had no hair at all: he was bald as a billiard ball, most likely as a result of the radiotherapy. He was alarmingly thin, little more than skin and bones, especially when compared with his former self. A bottle was hanging above the bed with a long yellow plastic catheter tube running down and ending under the skin on his bare arm. I crept cautiously up to the bed and slowly, very slowly slipped an orange into the outstretched, open palm. The orange, however, stayed there for only a moment; he did not grasp it, so it slipped off, plopped onto the floor and rolled away. I leaned over to the bars and looked straight into his face. He was staring with open eyes through the window, perhaps at the sky, but his eyes were a greyish-blue, he did not blink, and his face was like cotton wool, white as a sheet. There were ropes of purple veins in his temples, and what radiated from him was quite different from in my dream—a determined iciness of some kind. "So, how are things?" the nurse cried out as she made her way backwards along the corridor, a pile of incontinence pads in her arms, and she smiled in. I looked behind me and muttered, "Fine, thank you." "Is anything the matter?" she asked. As I did not answer, she came in, dropped the pads, stepped over to the bed, took one look at Norman and raised his wrist. I had seen that sort of thing before—in films, when they check the pulse. And also the scenes where they close a child's eyes. The nurse said it had been less than ten minutes since she had changed Norman's sheets. He had still been able to smile at her and even tried to reach under her skirt. ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Károly Kincses

A Cabinet of Curiosities

The Photographic Practices of Gábor Kerekes

Here I would like to discuss a photographer who brings a unique hue to the Hungarian palette of photography. Both in his personality and work, Gábor Kerekes combines the most modern twenty-first-century photographic methods with alchemist practices. There is a self-evident artlessness in his use of methods ranging from the *camera obscura* and Polaroid to the latest digital techniques. All this is done with the care and creativity that conveys the kind of mysticism inherent in his studies of nature in retro style. Perhaps in all contemporary Hungarian photography, it is in Kerekes's art that one can find the presence of the quality expected until about the beginning of the twentieth century in every master photographer, that is, to be able to choose from his arsenal of many techniques the one most suited for transmitting a given message. Hence Kerekes, unlike most photographers at the mercy of contemporary technology, works with great independence, which is of great benefit to his pictures.

His latest photographs explore birth, death and existence. These uniquely artistic and, at the same time, scientific photographs cover the elements of the microcosm and the macrocosm: the sky, the stars, planets; the microscopic blow-ups of his own blood, bodily fluids and drops of sweat, body parts in methylated spirits; objects carrying traces of forgotten knowledge. Kerekes does a peculiar thing in his work: he contemplates philosophical questions, while creating images of sophisticated composition.

With the passage of time, Kerekes has become a true professional. He did everything to make a living by selling his photos, striving to become known and acknowledged worldwide and doing his utmost to achieve this end. Even

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in middle age he is constantly learning, experimenting, observing his work with a critical eye, networking and paying close attention to the slightest detail.

Gábor Kerekes was born in Oberhart, Germany on August 2, 1945, a child of Hungarian parents fleeing West from the war. The family moved back to Hungary that same year. In 1964, Kerekes graduated from the Kölcsey Gimnázium, Budapest. Here he drew, painted—started seeing the world in images—but didn't take up photography. He unsuccessfully applied to the Hungarian Academy of Fine Arts. From 1964 to 1973 he was a catering apprentice, then worked as a waiter. What he experienced has left traces on his work to this day. He had served a respectable amount of beer when he decided to enroll in a photography trade school. Properly certified, he became an assistant reporter to the Budapest Photographers' Society; for the next five years he was photographer to the Metallurgical Research Institute. In 1979 he quit this job and went back to waiting, in a self-service restaurant.

He has been an active photographer since 1970, first showing his work at a Szentendre group exhibit. His schooling in the arts and the many photo albums he leafed through and analysed, helped Kerekes find his individual means of expression and a technique befitting his style. He won several awards in the quarterly competitions organised by the photography journal *Fotóművészet,* and in 1977 he was admitted to the Young Photo Artists' Studio which was just then being formed. This was the most notable group of the period—the only real workshop for young photographers wanting to cast a stone into the stagnant waters of Hungarian photography. For three years he was a member of its board, and from 1986 he was artistic director for four years. It was from 1986 too that he worked as photojournalist for leading papers and magazines. His press photos were part of the annual Press Photo exhibit, at which he won several significant awards over three years.

Although many, including myself, consider Kerekes to be one of the best in the trade, photojournalism gave him little satisfaction. He quit the job overnight. It was several years before he would take up photography again. In the meantime he read a great deal about art, technology, mythology, alchemy, astrology and other things that held his interest or were in some way related to photography. He himself says of his beginnings as a photographer:

> It was fairly late, at twenty-five, that I took up photography, and for twelve years I photographed Budapest pretty systematically, wandering four or five hours a day, stalking the streets with my camera bag, asking to be let into places... In 1983 I ended up by making only two or three prints; after that I didn't take photographs at all for ten years. I was in a creative crisis, as they say. I felt exhausted—that I could only repeat myself, and there would be not much point to that. What I wanted to do, I had done. From my twelve years of work, the thirty-five prints which I still recognise as mine I donated to the Hungarian Museum of Photography.

Then, after a long pause, Kerekes started taking photographs again. He broke with his previous style, turning to different subjects which he treated in different fashions. For instance, he made himself a metre-long *camera obscura* and a 30x40 cm camera which exposed onto the negative, and with these he photographed the moon, shooting stars, anatomical specimens, old chemists', physicists and medical instruments and objects. He printed the large negatives using archaic methods (cianotype, salt paper, albumin, Aristo Paper). It became important for him to be in control of the entire creative process, from conceiving the subject to creating the materials used: utilising these devices and copying the photo onto the paper he prepared himself before installing the final product and then arranging the exhibit, too.

Also active as an organiser, Kerekes was curator to the National Cultural Fund's Photography Board, from which the largest funds can be applied for to finance photography projects. He taught photography at the Journalists' Association's Photojournalist School, at the Academy of Fine Arts' Intermedia Department, and now heads a successful private school with György Stalter by the name of ASA Studio. More than a dozen well-known photographers have graduated from ASA during the past decade. Kerekes not only exhibits at international events but does much to create opportunities for talented young Hungarians trying to introduce themselves abroad. He is a curator of Hungarian shows at the annual Bratislava Photo Month (he also directed a group show there under the title *Filozoo*). He has won several scholarships; as of 1973 he has shown work in many one-man and group shows. His photos can be seen at the Musée d'Elysée (Lausanne); at the Madeleine Millott-Durrenberger (Strasbourg); the Galerie der Stadt Esslingen; the National Museum of Film, Television and Photography (Bradford); the Museo Ken Damy (Brescia), and in the Hungarian Museum of Photography.

> My successes abroad go back to my participation at a festival in Arles in '93. Many photographers got their big break there, Mapplethorpe, for instance. A collector from Strasbourg bought two of my pieces and I was invited to show my work in Belgium; an article on my work appeared in the Netherlands—so the snowball started rolling. Then the following year a lady from Strasbourg bought another one of my photos, and since then, thanks to her, and later to others' invitations, I have participated in countless exhibitions abroad, among other places in Esslingen, Lyon, then at the Europe–Europe exhibit. Of course you have to advertise yourself very deliberately in order to be known. You get passed from hand to hand—if you meet the requirements.

Like so many others among those prominent in the Hungarian arts, Kerekes was not exempted from the attention of the Communist secret services prior to 1989. He had been a member of the Communist Party since 1981 and was the shop steward in the restaurant he worked in. It was at this time that he was

recruited as an informer for the secret police. After a while he was forgotten and he did his best to forget this element of his past. In 2005, this episode was outed in a full-blown and coloured treatment in the Hungarian press and on the web. Drawing his conclusions, Kerekes took a step back from public life, but nudged by a sense of resentment and frustration, his creative drive grew all the more.

His works of the latter years are speculative, philosophical studies. Kerekes is conducting ontological examinations while the photographs stand their ground aesthetically as well. Just as there is a great difference between knocking back a cup of watered wine and expert wine-tasting, this type of work by Kerekes requires more in-depth examination: making use of our acquired knowledge for an individual interpretation of each photo.

Today Kerekes, in the prime of his creative strength, is a virtuoso of many photography techniques, be those archaic methods or the most up-to-date, digitalised media. He pursues neither of these in a self-sufficient manner; quite the contrary. His starting point is often digital technology; one of the best examples of this kind of work is his series *Over Roswell.*

> With my works of the last decade I would like to revive the forgotten relationship of Art and Science or, in other words, Craftsmanship and Art. My experience shows that my strivings in this direction are not unique. Artists, scientists and philosophers increasingly voice in their work the need for the reaffirmation of these relationships. The methods and aims of art and science differ; one strives toward objectivity, the other is inseparable from subjectivity. In ancient times strongly intuitive methods of examination ran parallel with the objectivity of archaic sciences.
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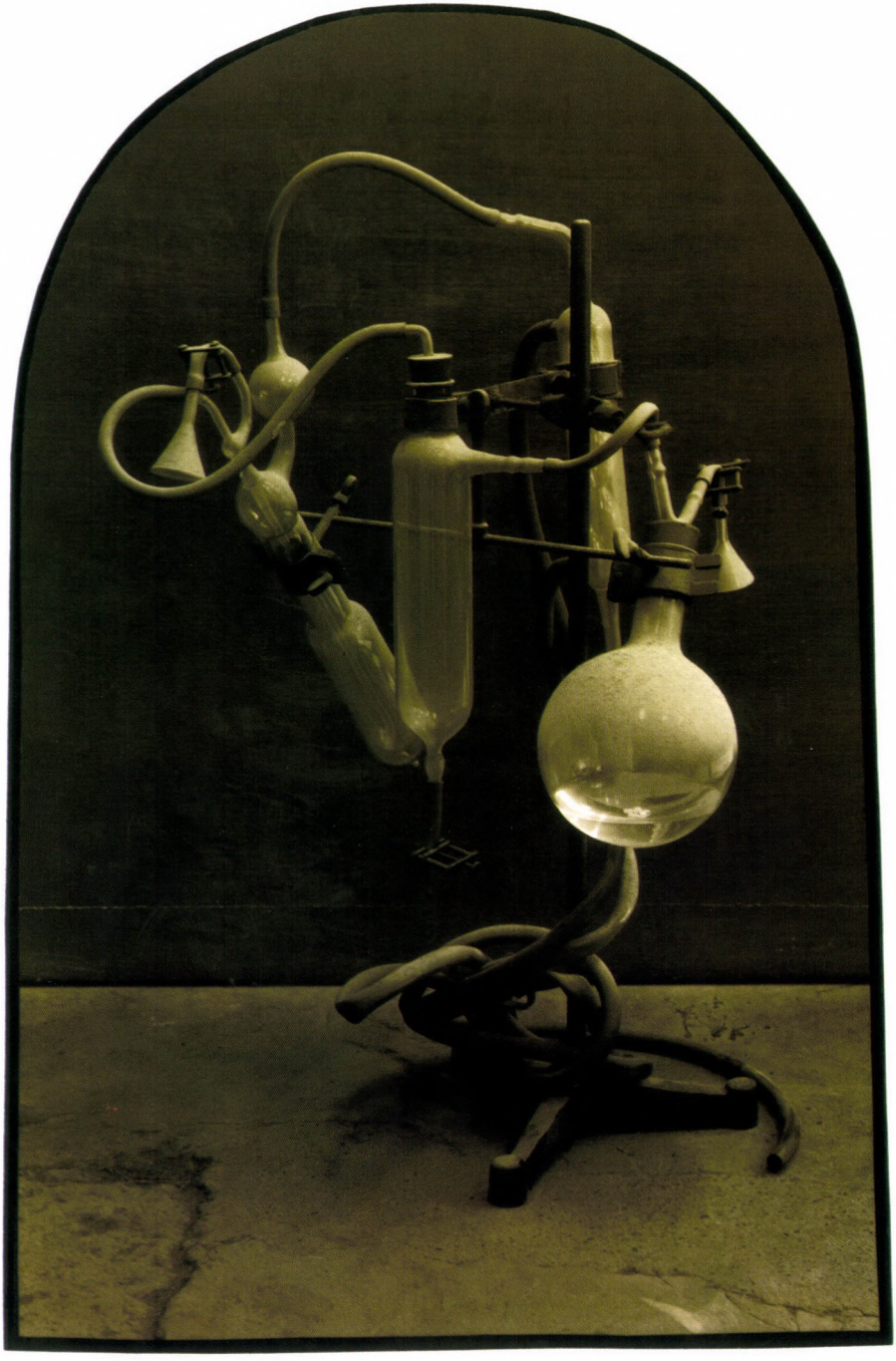
> The city of Roswell is located in New Mexico, USA, at 33.4 latitude and 104.5 longitude. It happened in 1947 that a few citizens claimed to have found a crashed UFO on the outskirts of town, with three deceased ufonauts. The FBI and the CIA silenced the incident. Because of the controversy surrounding it, the mysterious case still resounds scandal to this day. I found a computer programme called USA Photomap, with the help of which I can download a photo-quality landscape of any place in the States with the given coordinates. The maximum resolution is one metre per pixel, that is, a 17-col screen gives a resolution of 1024 pixels through which we can view 1024 metres. My imagination soared. Imagining myself in the place of the Roswell ufonauts, I was curious: what could they have seen in this place from the heights of outer space? I gave the coordinates. The image soon filled the entire screen: I was lucky! I didn't hit the centre of town, but about 600–800 meters away from the inhabited area. I was greeted by a strange and exciting sight: an abstract sign system of lines, circles and squares. One would think that these geometrical signs on the surface of the Earth were brought about in order to communicate some message or pass on information. The sights offered particularly diverse and almost uncodifiable configurations. If I were a ufonaut, I'd be sure to land here! I cut some

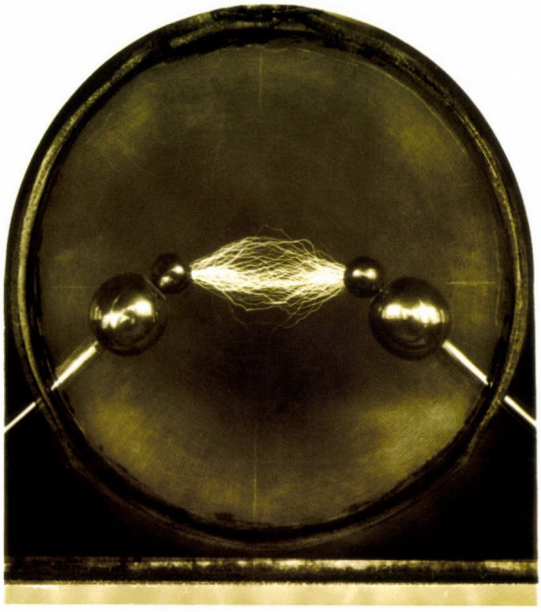
details of the screen with Screenshoot, amended it with pixels because of its low resolution, and printed it. I photographed the prints with Polaroid P/N method, finally contacting the negatives onto silver bromide paper. That is how I made this Roswell collection. Non-digital from digital!

This little story gives a good example of Kerekes's working method: a melting pot of acquired knowledge in which a fundamentally artistic approach and use of techniques combine seemlessly to bring about the images. Such works were the ones shot in science museums or shot in institutes of pathology, in which interpretations of existence, birth and death received a visual treatment. His *camera obscura* Sun and Moon shots and his photos of the Perseida meteors imply a network of wider connections, while his mountain landscapes recorded on large Polaroid sheets often suggest a phalansterian atmosphere. His physicist's, chemist's and medical instruments appear, due to their archaic representation, not simply as still lifes, but rather as gates through which the viewer can glance into the chambers of a centuries-old past. Kerekes takes Susan Sontag seriously: to photograph is to take possession, to acquire the subject of the image. With his photography, Kerekes first and foremost not only depicts, but rather aims to make real his own barely articulable inner system of thought (structural editing, connecting everything with everything else is characteristic of Kerekes). He aims to reveal all this as tangible, visible and ownable. And it is mere luck that these photographs are screaming to be shown on showcase walls. His luck, but mostly ours. Even if he declares of himself:

I photograph in a very selfish manner. I do these things exclusively for myself. If someone likes my work—well and good. But I only photograph for myself. For my own enjoyment. My own self-justification. To express myself. Only for this. ❧



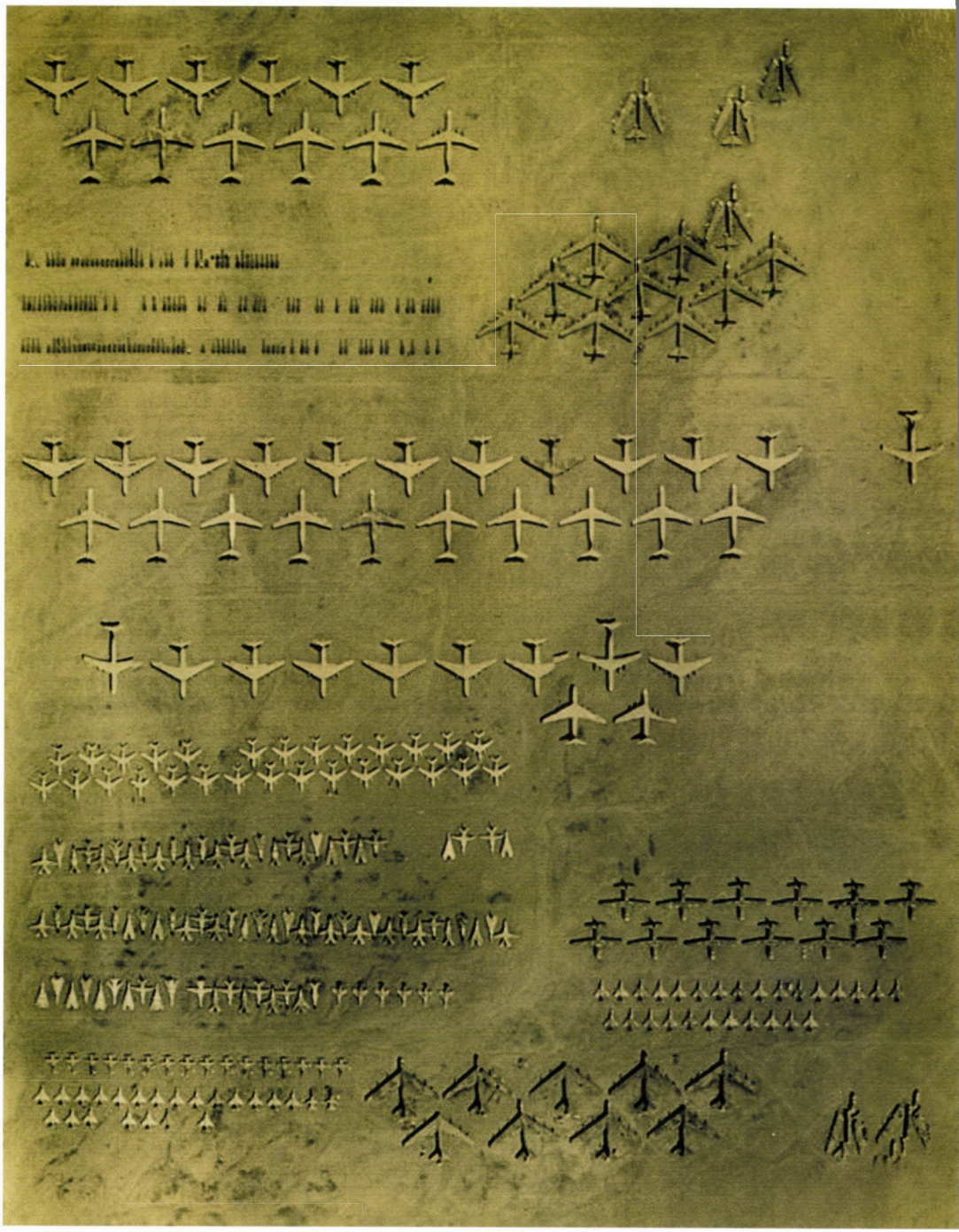
Gábor Kerekes: Chemical Instrument, 1991.
Toned gelatine silver print, 23 x 18 cm.



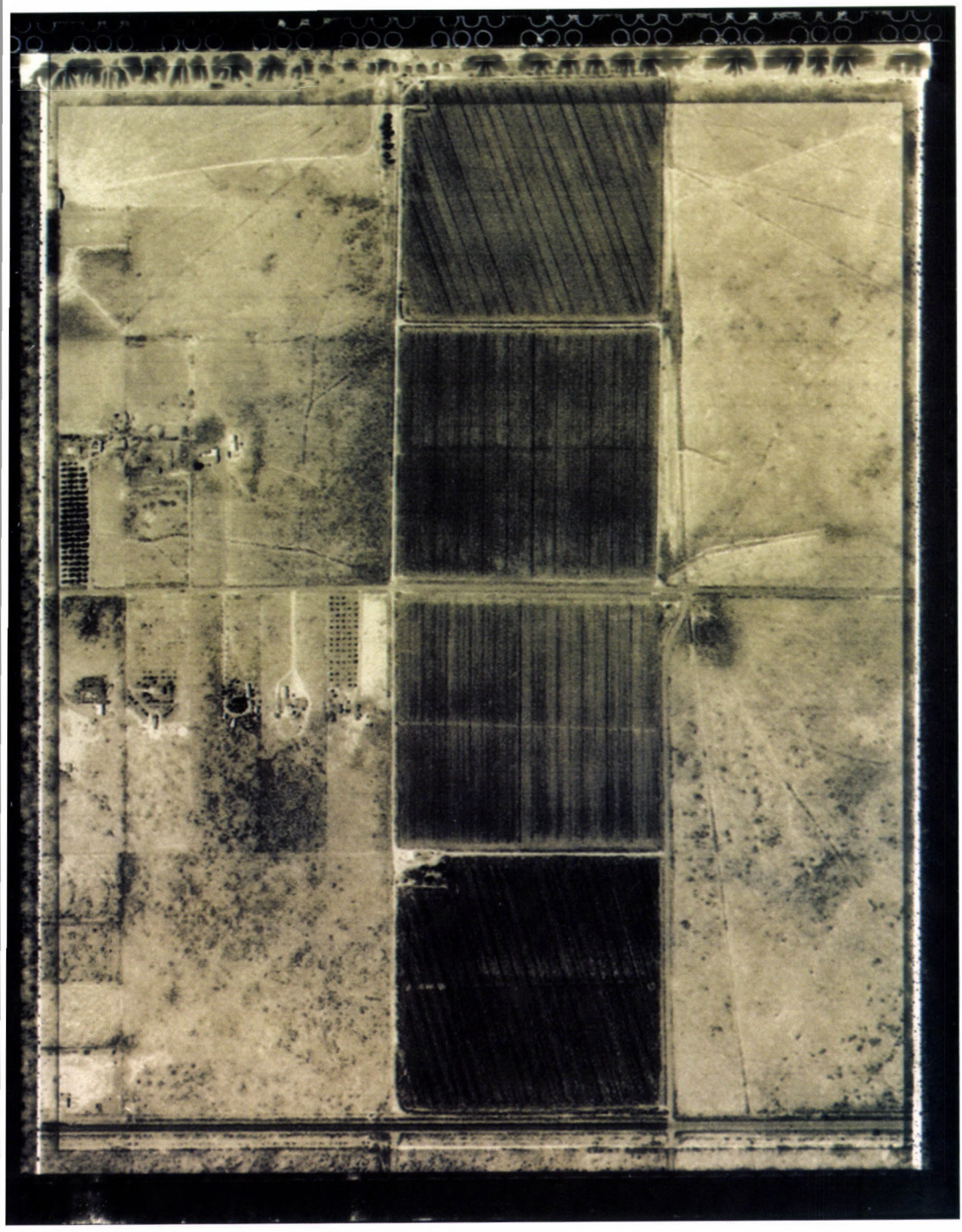
Gábor Kerekes: Discharge, 1994.
Toned gelatine silver print, 28 x 28 cm.

Gábor Kerekes: Eye Lens, 1993.
Toned gelatine silver print, 34 x 28 cm.

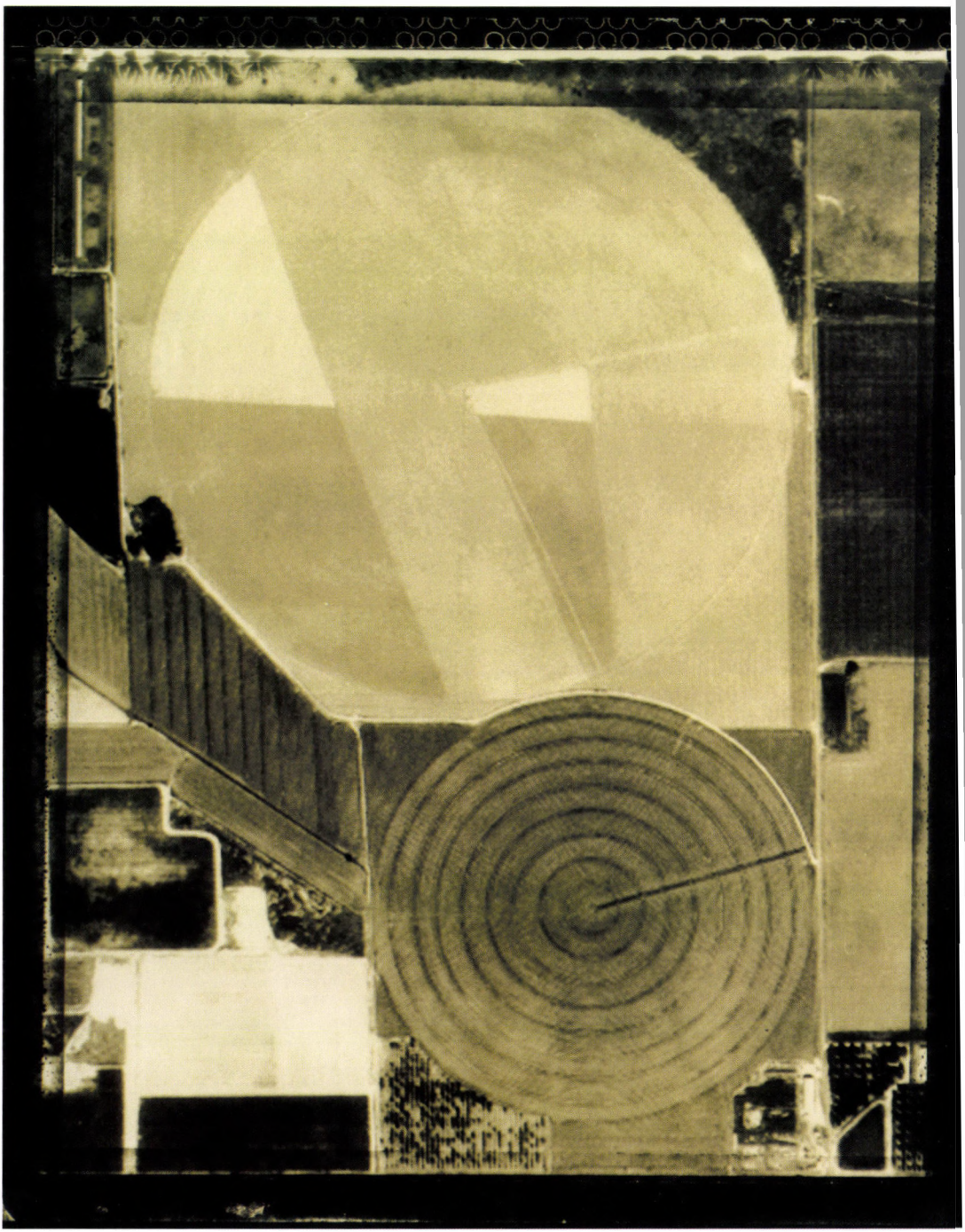
Gábor Kerekes: Head Cut, 1993.
Toned gelatine silver print, 32 x 27 cm.



Gábor Kerekes: Aircraft Cemetery-4, 2007.
Toned gelatine silver print, 25 x 19 cm.



Gábor Kerekes: Over Roswell, 2002.
Toned gelatine silver print, 14 x 11 cm.



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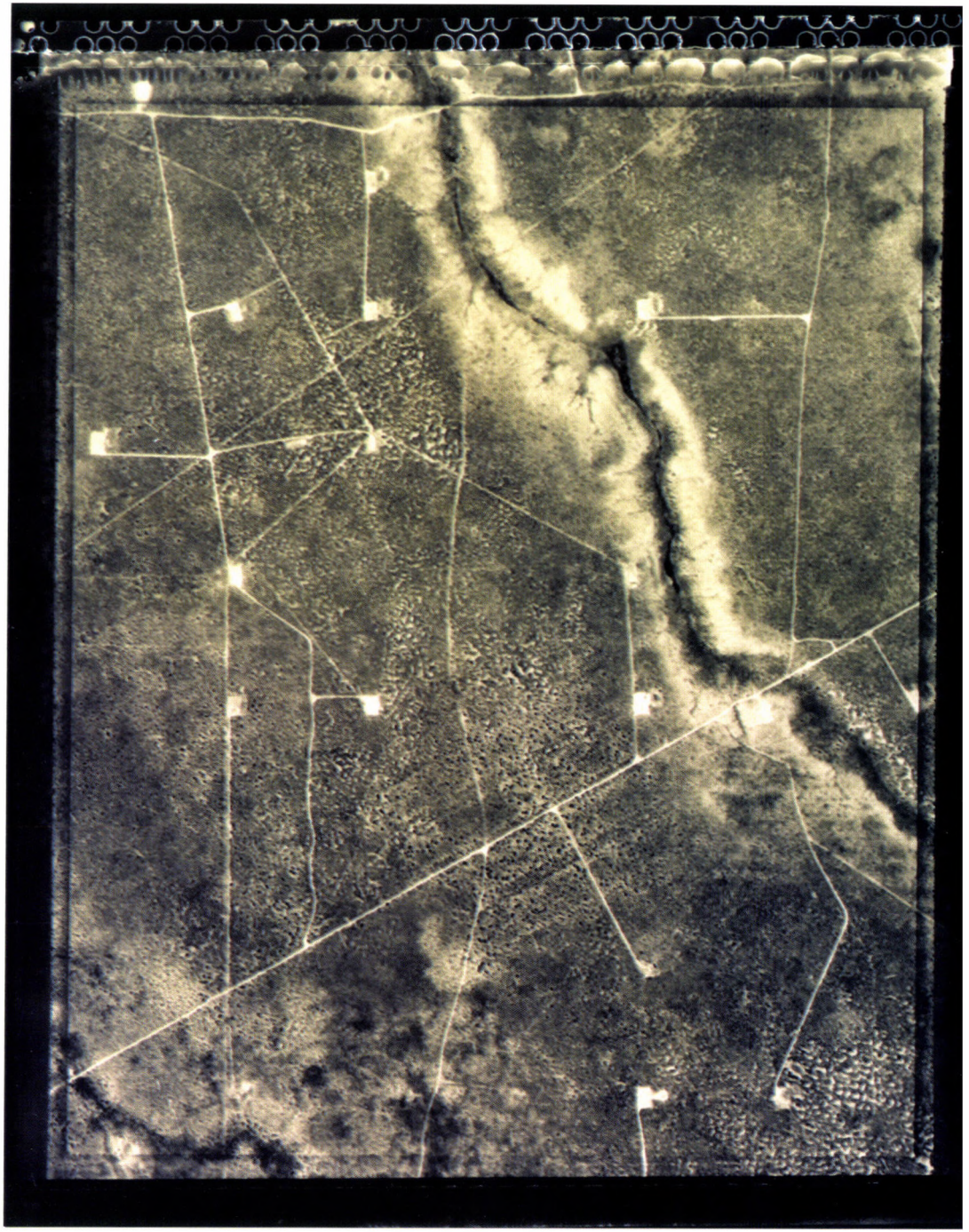

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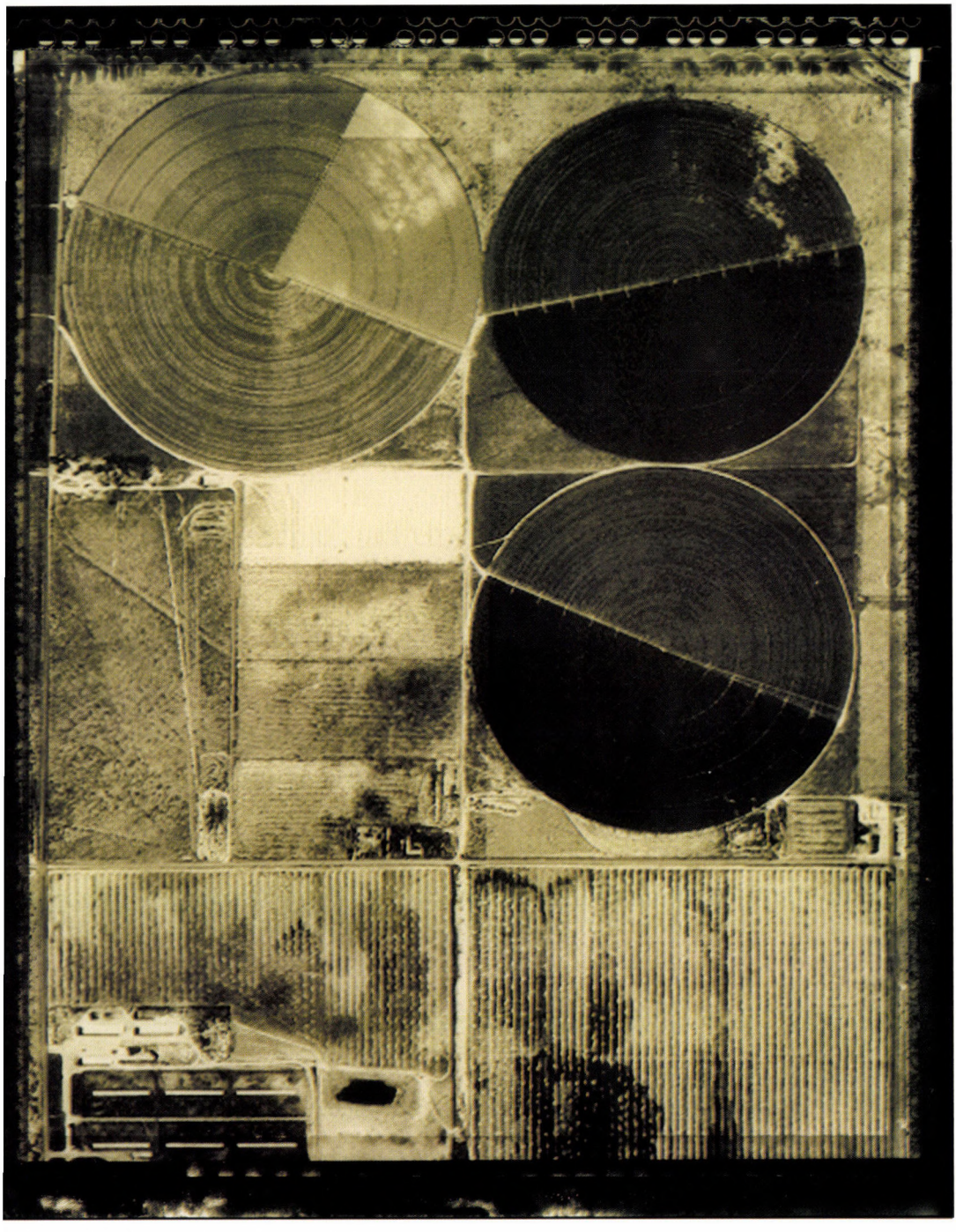

Gábor Kerekes: Over Roswell, 2002.
Toned gelatine silver print, 14 x 11 cm.

András Forgách

Zehuze

Excerpt from the novel

darling Daughter *yakirati,* what can I say, fifty-five was a pretty strange year, it's not a lucky number for me, I was always afraid of it, *hamshimwaychamesh,* fifty-five, what can I say, we better skip it, I can't wait for 56, I don't even like being 55 years old, it feels older than if one were sixty, just think, it dawned on me one day that I am always exactly a year older than the century, no matter how much you gloss over it, but of course my birthday itself was really nice, Daddy was in hospital, but he still came, so it made for a really nice birthday! your Dad gave me a coloured cover for the sofa, I can't imagine where he got the money to pay for it because there is none and I am so much in love with him all over again like a little girl who's still wet behind the ears, the colour is a sort of peaty brown, the colour of fallen leaves in autumn and that is the one thing that really pains me in this desert of a country, that there's no proper autumn to speak of, or even a decent forest where one could wade through the fallen leaves, when I first got to know your father it was autumn, I was on a tram with Papa, your grandfather, I was seventeen, we were going to pay a visit on someone somewhere in Buda, we got off the tram at the end, there were just three of us left on the No. 59 so I noticed this boy in his soldier's uniform on the tram, it looked good on him, how I loved to stand on the platform letting the wind blow my hair, I lost sight of him until all at once he was there sitting on a red bench and Papa was talking to him, because there was a star of David marked "Zion" on his K & K uniform, he just looked straight ahead and Papa was yelling: "Zion's a long way off, no need to sit!" and that's when

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András Forgách

has published several collections of plays and essays, as well as two novels, Aki nincs *(The One Who Isn't, 1999) and* Zehuze *(2007). Many of his plays are regularly performed. His translations include plays by Shakespeare, Heinrich von Kleist and Tennessee Williams. The novel from which the above extract is taken is reviewed by László Márton on pp. 119–125 of this issue. Its title means "that's how it is" in Hebrew.*

I became infatuated with him, dizzy with love, true back then I could have been infatuated with anyone, dizzy, dizzy, and when later he asked me to marry him and I said yes to the wise rabbi to be, the only thing I didn't want, was to cut off my hair on that account, I was proud of him that's for sure, but to be bald! no way! never!, Papa never took him seriously, Papa said they are poor little peasants, they stuffed goose in Ada, or rather paid others to do it for them, but we weren't that rich either, I don't know what Papa was bragging about, he didn't have anything to brag about, but he loved to brag, he loved the swagger, Mama served him, was a slave to him, and is a slave in the old people's home, the *bet avoth,* even today, and they don't even live on the same floor, and she has to climb the stairs with her broken heart every day, don't ever do that my darling baby girl, learn from your grandparents' example, when we set out to leave the country my Papa's crowd didn't get your Dad an immigration permit for Palestine, I went on ahead with your brother, a suckling baby via Alexandria while he hung around in Yugoslavia, and almost got himself shot because they took him for a spy, but then the Jews brought him out, they paid off everyone over there, went in the synagogue at the entrance, and left on the other side, have you seen the Moulin Rouge film? I liked the book immensely, I thought it was better than the film because it is more full, and allows you to round it out in your own head, the way you like, do you still remember those Toulouse-Lautrec reproductions in the three-volume Meyer-Graef? a man alone in a top hat, I love this picture since a quarter of a century and only now have I begun to understand the amazing talent that found expression in that man's expression, I've been wanting to ask for ages which nursery school do the two tots go to? and is the bigger one in a day-time school in the afternoon? and do they get a decent meal? that skin rash on my face that is my nemesis, it's called shingles, it's been itching for three or four months now, but I am only going to see a doctor about it today, it's now spread a lot and looks very ugly, but then does one ever find the time to go to the doctor's? and anyway who cares what a grandma's mug looks like, the trouble is there's nothing I can do about it anyway, of course I nearly forgot to write the most important thing of all, a few days ago I posted a box of *halvah* which I would be happy if it doesn't give you any trouble as for example I had trouble enough as it's not on the list of things that can be sent to Hungary, so what we wrote on the parcel in Hungarian is that it's honeycomb, halvah is not made in Hungary, so I hope it reaches you and it isn't sent back, there are such big changes everywhere that it leaves one's head in a spin, but to tell the truth I was just a wee bit surprised that in your last letter you casually mentioned just "by the way, I hear there's no money for your travel", no money, that was all, never mind it felt like a slap in the face, I hope that when you reach my age and you want to visit your daughter far, far away she will be more thrilled to see you, the older one gets, the faster one sheds the fading leaves and only the person herself is left, one's

main thoughts are for the children, not that I'm old in my mind, but still it's the family that comes to the forefront, but as the years go by I have learnt that a cock stewed in its own juices never gets any wiser, it just gets all the tastier for others to fatten up on, we can't go *there* to live, you have to understand that my sweet daughter, you could come here to live, but then what would be the point? it's grown cold over here in recent days, my brother brought round a cheap paraffin stove but I don't use it and it stinks awfully in Daddy's room, not a day goes by that I don't curse the heavens three times, four times over for being fated to live like a prole, rather in his room I switch on a flimsy little electric heater which doesn't give any heat but at least it costs a fortune, I picked up on the bitter and resigned tone of your last letter but if the children are poorly and what's more, have an illness as serious as Matyi's, I hope he has fully recovered from the meningitis, but that apart I was more than a bit surprised to learn that you're pregnant again, though of course that's not my concern, it's your business, but we somehow got used to the idea that you would call a halt at three for the time being, after all you're a working mother and woman and anyway what with your high blood pressure I can't begin to imagine what your circumstances are like, though if it were up to you I know you would breed a whole nursery school of the brats, but do have some consideration for yourself, the first one was hard enough while the second was harder still, and the third did for your teeth and killed your blood pressure, and now a fourth, madness! did you get the watch? I was given the fur coat by my parents, so wear it if you like it, I can wear it when I get to visit, but why do you write nothing about the conditions you are living in, do you still have that bloody person sharing the place? does she at least pay the rent punctually? can't you give her notice? is the ceiling still leaking? I imagine the house must be a bit tight with three children, and now a fourth on the way! crazy! don't worry I've already put in an order to Zurich for your medicine, eight bottles, all I ask is that you send a doctor's prescription in good time so you don't have to pay duty, I read Comrade Khrushchev's speech and also the previous one to the architects twice over, it's very interesting, when I read it my first thought was of you, it's clear that outstanding men like him speak to all of us, it's a delight to read such wise simple plain and profoundly true words, it's only we Communists who are granted the beauty and happiness of true illumination, I'm truly delighted that you were sent off for a holiday which only confirms my suspicion that your physical condition is fairly rocky and then you want to nurse others? all I can hope is that you're able to make good use of the time, it's only when you start to put on years that you learn how to *rest*, how to be *calm*, anyone who cracks that secret can live better than people who are continually on the trot, even under the most trying circumstances, admittedly your Dad is like that because even if he has no urgent jobs to attend to, he always finds something to do, even though he suffers from it, he goes out

looking for suffering, that's a very Jewish thing but then I've seen more than a few Jews who are sleek and crafty, take it from me my baby girl, this isn't a wonder of the world, you will know that there have been major quarrels in the world of Soviet literature, Daddy is in two minds, with one half in this camp and one half in the other, don't get me wrong, he's not gone schizo no more than any intellectually thinking and feeling people who build the wall higher and higher around their emotional life, it can't be any other way, so the years take their toll willy-nilly you silly darling you mustn't give a thought to the parcels you receive, they are just cast-offs only some of which could conceivably be of any use to you, because they are mostly worthless, I'm glad you will be going away to Lake Balaton, that will be a lovely few days for the children and parents to be together, your letter was a bit snappy that's for sure but that's how it is in our family, that is how we, the famous *Almonds* behave, sometimes tempers boil over like milk when it's heated up, but my goodness! it's not a capital offence surely, even in this world it's permissible to love someone? I'm well aware that three children and a husband and being pregnant and then your own work besides must make peace and quiet hard to find, but even so to be able to govern and control yourself is a huge advantage, and as far as the medicine goes you're a silly little donkey, or rather a big donkey: it's no sin to ask for medicines especially if the people's democracy won't hand over foreign currency for them! the people's democracies have to spend money on weapons if the English and French start playing their ship-war games on the Mediterranean and that blasted Suez Canal so what else can you expect from the Arabs? the English think they're allowed to do anything I listen to Radio Kossuth every day at the crack of dawn, I even know what the temperature is in Budapest, now the French and the English are on the rampage around here with their battleships but who do they think is scared of them? when the Arab people has at long last won its independence along come the dirty imperialists and they've got the effrontery to pretend that they didn't steal everything, and I mean everything, they could lay their hands on, it's been pretty tense since Saturday if one listens to what our "bourgeois" radio is saying one ends up not knowing whether one is coming or going, if one's a boy or a girl, but by Sunday we knew that all was OK in Poland! no blood was spilled and people haven't taken to the streets, there are no food shortages and no murders and no counter-revolution! my darling baby girl I really do understand your anger about the home help, especially when those bitches behave like pickpockets, but it's not possible to run a household completely on your own because you either have to be at home or you go out to work, yes, I can well believe there's more reason for grief than joy if one looks at public affairs, but a Communist has to be optimistic, especially after the XXth Congress, in any case up till now the world has just gone always forward rather than back, right now it's typically April weather here, cold one minute, warm

the next, for the last three days all of a sudden a warm *chamsin*, fifty degrees Centigrade just for a change, I hope the children are drinking lots of cocoa and what about my darling daughter? are you eating properly or are you a skinny cat again? don't go neglecting yourself, you're the one who has to look after feeding herself, Daddy is sending you some cloth for sheets for your birthday present and your wedding anniversary combined, you may be able to sew it into a duvet cover, we listened a lot to Radio Kossuth on the evening of October the 23rd but we weren't much wiser as a result, we can only hope and wish that no chaos comes of it but things will be straightened out sensibly and the Hungarian people can start building *a future with confidence*, we keep our eyes open for any news from Hungary, the most recent reports have been reassuring, but what's more important is how *you* have been spending these difficult days and how *you* all are, don't hold anything back! you have a habit of glossing over things my baby girl, you're a master at sugarcoating things, like you did with the earthquake pretending it didn't happen, we hope that by the time this letter reaches you the air over there will be more normal though I am not forgetting that a hard winter is on its way and there are no windows or fuel for heating and you with your swelling tummy, crazy, isn't it? and on the top of it, are you still going to work when there's this idiotic shooting going on? things are starting to get fairly hot in this part of the world as well, even your radio station in Hungary is reporting that there's been a mobilisation (or a partial one anyway) in Israel and "gunfire has been exchanged", what can I say? I'm lost for words! why do we have to suffer? we deserve it fair enough but the kids? we watched the dreadful devastation and all we could is sigh for you all and be deeply moved at the fate of a beautiful country, at a nation tearing itself apart, we are a little bit calmer now but we don't kid ourselves, we are well aware that you are at risk of frightful hardship especially with winter approaching, you have no idea of what we are going through when for 18 hours out of the 24 we are constantly thinking of you, talking about you and no news about how you are, Daddy has aged 20 years and can't even come to the dinner table without bursting into tears the moment he lifts a fork to his mouth, or at the very least sighing such a deep sigh that it would break even a heart of stone, but how are you, my baby girl? what date is it due? I will put in this post this week a parcel of clothes that you can sell off, but they may come in handy for you too, we listen to the radio transmission from Pest every evening so you can write frankly, I am well aware that a 1,000-page novel would not be enough even to sketch out all the horrible things that have happened there! we'll be delighted if the coat for Robby is warm sad to say his size is more than a bit "grandioso", it's pretty well impossible just to think of finding something to fit him, the small pair of shoes and trousers are for Matyi I'm sending it airmail but it still takes a preposterously long time, I would have put them in the post the next day but even that has to be organised, arms

twisted in certain places, only your private affairs and personal lives are what are of interest to us, and Radio Kossuth or the BBC or Israeli radio tell us nothing about that, we are informed about which shops are open between what hours, which tram services are running and so on, but none of that is of any interest to us, Sarah? a little girl? really? what's her weight? are you sure it wasn't premature what with all the excitements you have been living through? the suspense is killing me, I find it very difficult having to wait for the answers to all my questions, didn't she come too early? and have you got over the jaundice? I at last got the letter in which you gave an account of the pain and suffering that you have gone through, I know that mastitis is one of the most awfully painful conditions there is on this earth, pure hell, why oh why do you of all people have to go through that? little Sarah will never be able to truly appreciate what sacrifices you made to be able to feed her with mother's milk ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

Ágnes Heller

Twenty Years On

The story of the last twenty years, of the period since the "change of regime" introducing a genuinely democratic system of government, is a novel one for Hungary. Yet, it is a very old story. God freed the Israelites from bondage in Egypt in order that they should thenceforth have no other God but Him: they must obey the law, so that they should no longer be enslaved to a despot. There was much rejoicing among the people to begin with. But when things did not go as smoothly as they had imagined, they immediately longed to be back with the fleshpots of Egypt and started worshipping the golden calf. That, in a nutshell, is also what has happened to Hungary over the last twenty years.

Those who have directly known servitude and oppression, and for whom freedom is the greatest value and gift, have not ceased rejoicing to this day. I myself am of that camp. Regime change, as far as I was concerned, was a miracle that one hoped for but did not expect to see, and a miracle it has remained. Whatever has happened since will not alter that. As János Vajda might have written in "Twenty Years On," his poem of 1876: whatever the woman he apostrophised may have done over the past twenty years, she was still the woman he had given his love to for ever. All I can hope—to stay with János Vajda—is that we too shall be able to produce an equally fine tale under the title of "Thirty Years On."

Ágnes Heller,

author of numerous scholarly books in various philosophical fields, is one of the most prominent of the disciples of Georg Lukács. She was dismissed from her teaching post at the University of Budapest in 1958, but found refuge as a member of the newly founded Sociology Research Group of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in 1963. After Lukács's death in 1971, there was no one to protect his followers against political harassment, and many of them, including Ágnes Heller and her husband, Ferenc Fehér, felt forced to emigrate in 1977. She taught at the University of Melbourne until 1986, when she was appointed Hannah Arendt Professor of Philosophy at the New School for Social Research in New York. Since 1989, she has also taught in Hungary.

That hope is more than an empty longing. A skeleton of democratic institutions has been present virtually from the very start, and these institutions constantly offer themselves for adjustment and correction. Over these twenty years, Hungary has become a member state of the European Union, and in so doing it has almost got others to forget completely (as we ourselves, sad to say, have forgotten) that we fought on the wrong side in both world wars. I might even say that this time, for once, the country has joined the winning side. What is missing is a democratic spirit, a zest for enterprise, bravery and patriotism—scare commodities. And not among the political classes but among citizens at large, among the elderly as among the young. If I were to start enumerating causes, the list would be endless, especially when I know that others would cite different causes and blame other political figures. It therefore seems more advisable to describe circumstances and details.

Prior to the change of regime, most people in Hungary, if called on to think of a happy country with a democratic political system, would have thought of our happy and prosperous neighbour, Austria. Not primarily as a model of democracy, but as prosperous. If Hungary had managed to break free in 1956, maybe we too might be living in comparable prosperity. But living conditions would have improved even if we had jumped out of the Soviet camp in 1989 on our own, or if the Soviet Union had not imploded. Since that was not how things panned out, no Western state has had any political stake in Hungary's prosperity. The country has stayed relatively poverty-stricken, inheriting the state debts that had been racked up during the last decade or more of the Kádár era; concurrently, the standard of living of a substantial segment of the population sank well below what it had been previously. Hardly surprising, then, that those losing out longed for the fleshpots of Egypt; ominous sign though it was, the socialist victory in the general election of 1994 was understandable. What it also signalled was the weakness of the democratic mentality, a devaluation of freedom. Could that landslide success be put down as a vote for the Hungarian Socialist Party itself, even a vote for the legacy of János Kádár?

The politicians showed that they had no experience in playing democratic politics. They had no chance or time to learn either, and hence they carried on doing what they knew already, or had learned. When in opposition (all due respect to the exceptions) they do not comport themselves as the opposition to a democratically elected government but as the opposition to a party dictatorship. As if they alone were carrying the flag of honesty against the dishonest. When, on the other hand, they become the governing party (and here it is hard to think of a significant exception) regardless of age they pursue the same paternalistic, populist political game.

A democratic politician needs certain diplomatic skills. He needs flexible contacts with all the players who stand for democratic consensus. Very few politicians in Eastern Europe, it seems, have acquired that ability. Furthermore it is expected of a population schooled in democracy that it shall show respect for those in high office, whoever may occupy these posts. That capacity—indeed, the disposition—is not developing but, over the last fifteen years, it has been deteriorating.

Extremist antidemocratic and racist forces and political bodies are on the rise. The right wing often accepts their support, and even more often exploits the disregard for democratic norms for its own ends. The left wing often feels more secure, protected by legalistic formalities, than by mobilising public opinion. Party-political point-scoring in parliament (which is decisive, of course) is rigidly contrasted with political point-scoring in the streets.

It is a widely repeated quip that success in politics depends on communication. The media shape public opinion by taking slogans from the vocabulary of mass democracies and parrot them, thinking that this makes democrats too. A democratic mentality, however, only arises in democratic actions, while the success of the communication process depends of the receptiveness of those at the receiving end.

Ideals are also in doubt. The left wing operates with its traditional bric-à-brac. Under other conditions, some of these ideals might even be productive. One such, for instance, is the social democratic idea of the welfare state; alas, a precondition for a functioning welfare state policy is a pre-existing degree of prosperity. For Hungary right now that can only be a dream. The right also enlists old ideologies without giving them new meaning. The worst of these is, perhaps, the idea of patriotism, even though symbolic politicising plays only a very small role here. Being a good citizen makes a person a good patriot. But the biggest problem of all is that neither the older nor the younger generation places much value on personal freedom.

There are serious problems with the younger generation not just in Hungary but in almost all the EU member states. It seems almost as if the modern democracies of Europe—unlike the USA—have been unable to bring their young people up to value freedom or to practise democracy. In Hungary, to compound the problem, the older generation has a short memory. They seem to have forgotten the security police, the informers, the almost routine resort to hypocrisy, sneakiness and outright lies. Instead, nostalgia grows merely for that household plot that supplemented collective farm wages and for the days of full employment. Some draw sustenance from the ideology of the pre-war Horthy times, a period few have personally experienced, and are happy to feed this to others, unrolling a map of Greater Hungary and cursing all of Hungary's neighbours. There are now young people who never lived under any other political system than the present one; no wonder they can only see the darker

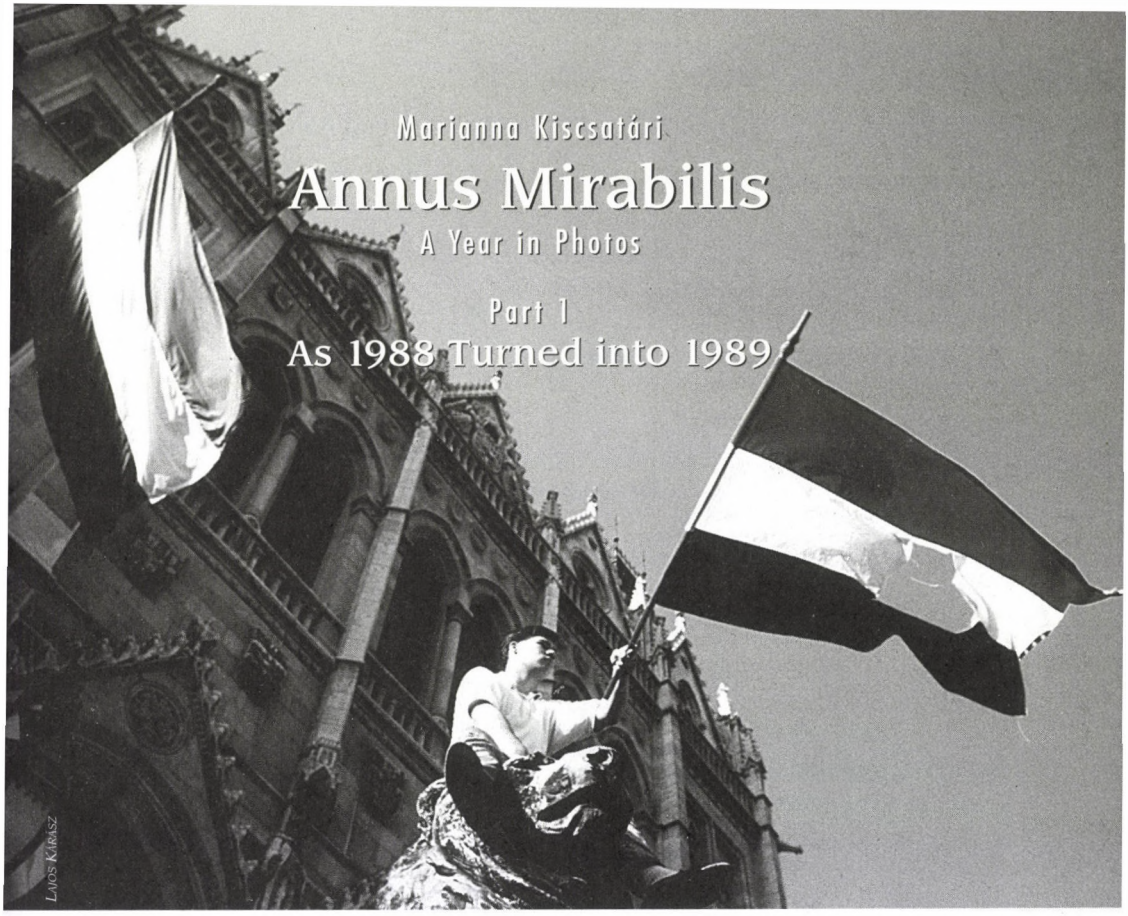
sides of capitalism and the liberties it entails. The movements and parties that carried out the change of regime are also partly to blame for this. Freedom—the right to personal freedom, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion and freedom of speech—was taken so much for granted as an indisputable value that nobody noticed that not everyone necessarily agreed. We of the democratic Hungarian intelligentsia have to admit that we, too, were partly responsible for everything that happened in the heady changover years, and what is happening now.

We have been unable to communicate our image and knowledge of the new world that we had entered. Maybe we have been so preoccupied with the political agenda of the day that we failed to consider the broader aspects and interconnections of our new world. Do people really understand, if only a minority, the rules and opportunities of the world in which we now live? If we say capitalism, they understand: privatisation, loss of jobs, and foreign capital. What do people know about the market? Do they know, for instance, what is really meant by a self-regulating market, state regulation and state intervention? What do they know about democracy? In most cases it amounts to thinking there is an unnecessary parliament, bickering parties, corrupt politicians, lying, power-mad, extremely well-paid idlers, or worse. That is an unfair characterisation even of the current Hungarian parties and politicians and their, sadly, all too weak performance. And when asked what can be done about the situation, the answer usually given is: nothing. Only bluster, whinge and blaming others.

Hungary's populace is less ready to utilise the opportunities that it has. Neither those that came with the change of regime, nor those that resulted from accession to the European Union. Proportionately many fewer young Hungarians than the young of other Eastern European countries are willing to take on the challenge of working abroad; those who do tend to be those with higher qualifications, precisely those who are most needed in Hungary. Many are disinclined to move any distance to try their luck somewhere else, even within Hungary itself, preferring to scrape by on unemployment benefits.

Mobility exists where there was no socialist paternalism. It is time we woke up to the fact that the final years of the Kádár era left their mark on the Hungarian character. Has the "best barracks" in the socialist camp proved to be the "worst barracks" following 1989? How are we going to finally free ourselves of the legacy of the Kádár years?

Only if we manage to throw off that burden shall we be able to write a more cheerful "thirty years on" report. The politicians do not have the luxury of electing another people for themselves, but does the Hungarian people elect those who are best for themselves? It is not a question of who started this or that: we should not be so childish as to carry on such quarrelling till we drop from old age. It will only be through the efforts of all those who play a part in politics, electors and elected alike, that Hungary will be freed from this burden. A fresh page needs to be turned —for everyone, all at once. ❧



Hungarians lived through more changes and upheavals in 1988 than in any one year since 1956. Politics burst onto the streets—whether officially permitted or not—and János Kádár, in his dotage, was dislodged from the country's helm, which he had steered since 1956. In terms of Eastern European politics, this was a peaceful changing of the guard. The sense of the end of an era and uncertainty about the future was pervasive. Hungary had a forty-year-old prime minister by November; his government was to be swept along by the avalanche of 1989.

Marianna Kiscsatári
is curator of the contemporary section (1956 up to the present) of the Historical Photographic Collection of the Hungarian National Museum, Budapest, which holds all the photographs in this article.

ZOLTÁN FEJÉR

Demonstration against the levelling of rural communities in Transylvania. Heroes' Square. Budapest, 27 June 1988.

Protesters march under tight police control to Budapest's largest public space (the Műcsarnok Gallery is visible in the background) in what was the first officially permitted mass protest of the Kádár era. Around 80,000 demonstrators, brandishing placards with the names of Transylvanian villages known to have been razed by Ceauşescu's henchmen, protested against the Romanian government. The official gloss was the modernisation of village communities, but it was clear that the authorities sought to erase villages—many of them idyllic—which were largely inhabited by the ethnic Hungarian minority. Many architecturally cherished sites were endangered. Mixed ethnic villages would have been turned into virtually monocultural (i.e. Romanian) communities had the Romanian authorities been able to complete their drive. The "reform" movement, which ignited in Transylvania in the spring of 1989, ended with the fall of the Ceauşescu regime (and the execution of Ceauşescu and his wife) at Christmas that year. ❧

Hungarian–Czechoslovak talks on jointly building a dam and a hydroelectric power station on the Danube started as far back as the Fifties. A treaty governing the building and operation of the Nagymaros–Gabčikovo dam was signed in 1977. The aim of the project was to generate electric power, but it also promised benefits for easier shipping and flood defence. From the mid-Eighties, however, growing concern was voiced in Hungary about the potential damaging effects the project would have on the supply of drinking water to a huge area (which included Budapest), the severe damage to a unique European water ecosystem and the most picturesque landscape on the Danube Bend. The Hungarian government finally gave in to the pressure of demonstrations, the widespread canvassing for signatures and the accumulation of environmental impact assessments. Construction on the Nagymaros side was halted on 13 May 1989. ❧

Miklós Németh's administration, the last to be appointed under the single-party system of the People's Republic of Hungary, held power from 24 November 1988 to 23 May 1990. During that period, Parliament voted through the legislation that was absolutely necessary to affect a peaceful transition to democracy. In his inaugural speech as prime minister, Németh stressed that a "socialist" market economy, pluralism, constitutionality, rule of law and intensified enterprise would be the keynotes of his administration. In interviews with foreign newspaper correspondents, he did not rule out the possibility that domestic reforms might lead to a Western-style democracy. Bills on granting the right of assembly, the right to strike (based on Poland's Solidarity model), freedom of conscience and religion, as well as bills allowing the emergence of a full-blown market economy, were steered through at a hectic pace during the first few months of 1989. ❧

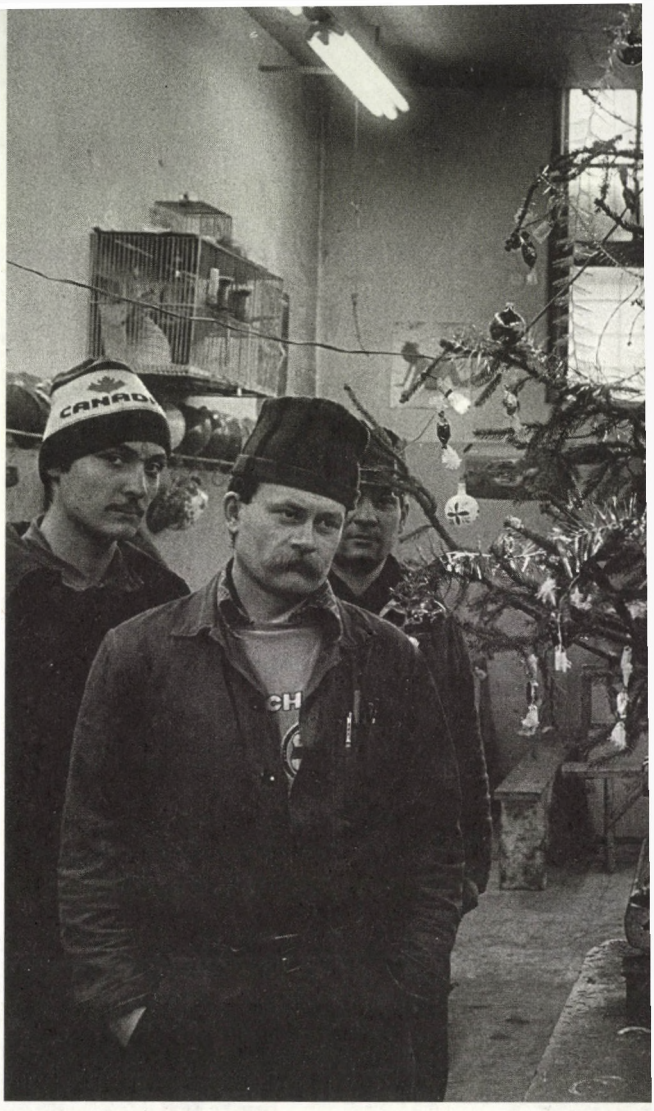
ZOLTÁN FEJÉR

Parliament votes for a sombre Miklós Németh (in the middle of the second row) as prime minister of Hungary. Budapest, 24 November 1988.

Demonstration against the building of a dam across the Danube between Nagymaros and Gabčikovo (formerly Bős, Hungary), Vörösmarty Square, Budapest. 12 September 1988.

ANDREA ARKÓ

Nineteen eighty-nine commenced—as every year had done for the past decade and would do for the next—with the announcement of price hikes. The crisis had endured for over a decade. Hungary's economy was exhausted: agriculture had been bled white, pay capped and this was coupled with wasteful consumption of cheaply available raw materials and energy. Central planning strove to regulate the production and distribution of goods down to the last detail. The system, however, failed to meet real consumer needs, tailored as it was to fulfil the expectations of the authorities and satisfy the Party leadership's megalomania. To take just one example: iron ore was mined to make more mining machinery in order to mine more iron ore, and so on.



The non-viability of the system was already glaringly evident in the early Fifties, but problems started to become acute by the mid-Seventies. The closed market of Comecon countries managed to stave off the explosive rise in global crude oil and raw material prices, but the Soviet Union became increasingly reluctant to supply raw materials at a big discount because it, too, suffered domestic supply problems of growing severity. Hungary did not have the wherewithal to arrange credits, since it had little in the way of goods to sell. By 1985, fully one quarter of the state budget was devoted to bailing out loss-making enterprises, and by 1987 that proportion had risen to one third.

During the Eighties, Hungary's gross national product stagnated. Production nominally rose, but at the cost of swollen losses and international debts: goods imports were worth more than Hungary's production. The balance of

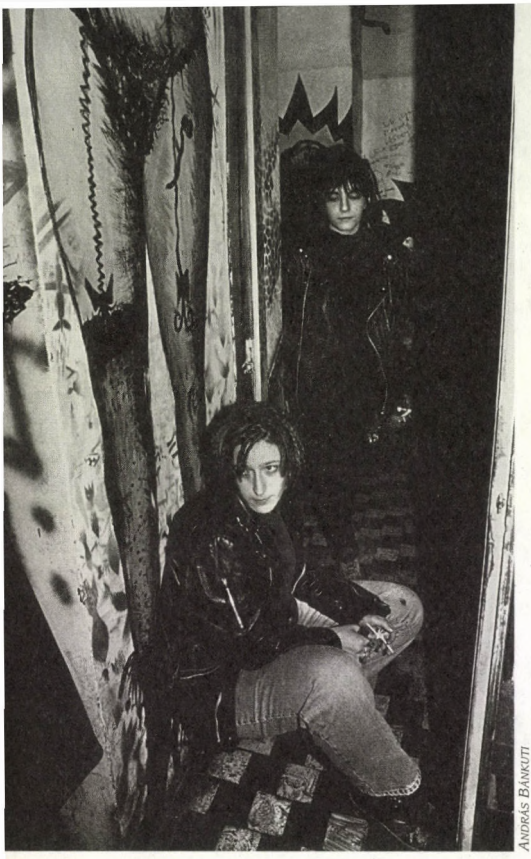
Christmas 1989 with the pipe fitters at the Ózd Metallurgical Works.

IMRE BENKÖ

payment deficit jumped to 6.5 per cent in 1987, by which time the national debt had reached an eye-watering $17.8 billion. By the spring of 1990 it was $21 billion, which represented 66 per cent of the annual GNP at the time. The debt was to mount even further. Real wages stagnated, and the only way households could maintain their standard of living was through their reliance on the grey and black economies. Meanwhile foreign credit was pumped into the welfare system. While from 1975 to 1986 prices merely doubled, over the next decade they were to rocket tenfold.

By that time every available means had been used to head off the crisis. Economic reforms introduced between 1986 and 1988 ushered in a bankruptcy law, a two-tier banking system, and value added tax (VAT) as well as a tax on personal incomes. A law designed to prompt state enterprises to turn themselves into commercial companies and attract foreign investment came into force on 1 January 1989. It was this wave of economic reform which hit certain units of the Ózd Metallurgical Works. After various failed attempts to privatise the factory, bits of it were demolished and the rest run down, with grievous effects on local unemployment.

In 1989 inflation soared to 17 per cent. The populace was saddled with a daunting rise in the cost of living: medicine prices skyrocketed 80 per cent, newspapers by 60 per cent, public transport by 55 per cent and milk and milk products by 40 per cent. By autumn 1989, between 100,000 and 120,000 people had been laid off, adding to the size of the country's jobless underclass. ❧



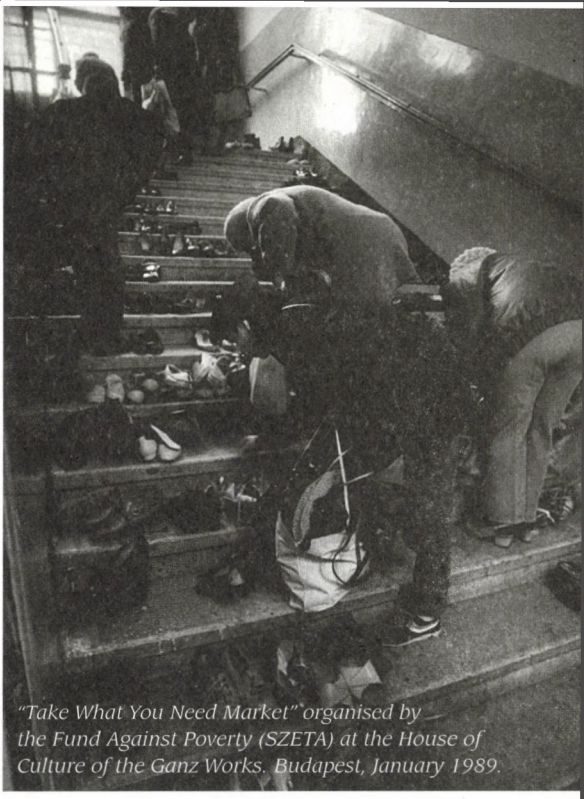
ANDRÁS BÁNKUTI

The Black Hole alternative club. Budapest, January 1989.

As early as 1910, the MÁVAG Locomotive and Engine Works built a housing estate for its factory workers whose facilities included a house of culture—at the time the most modern of its kind. Residents of the estate also had access to medicinal and steam baths. The baths originally attached to that institution were converted into a youth club. The fall in living standards during the Eighties mainly affected the young. Crime figures and statistics on drug use and homelessness became ever starker. Various subcultures—punks, and so on—began to attract young intellectuals as a means of self-expression, with various alternative types of music becoming fashionable alongside the, by now, generally accepted rock music. From the mid-Eighties on, the young began to meet in the Black Hole, which was located in the remaining usable rooms of the house of culture. The authorities regarded the bands that played there as antagonistic, on account of both the bluntness of the lyrics and the lifestyle of the musicians. Advertised concerts were often cancelled for "technical reasons"; even if they did go ahead, anyone attending had to undergo identity checks and other aggravations by the leather-coated, necktie-wearing members of Hungary's security police (the most popular groups performing were *Bizottság* (Committee), *URH* (VHF) and *Orgazmus* (no translation needed). ❧

Samizdat publications started appearing in substantial quantities in Hungary from 1976. To begin with, these "editions" were typed copies, but later on they were duplicated by stencil, one of the most important being a volume issued in 1980 to commemorate István Bibó (1911–1967), a highly influential political thinker and a minister without portfolio in Imre Nagy's government. The best known of the samizdat journals went under the masthead *Beszélő,* whose 27 issues with a print run of 2,000 copies were printed on a proper press. By 1983, the authorities were carrying out increasingly frequent house searches, and closed down the so-called "Rajk boutique" that operated in the flat of László Rajk Jr., as well as bringing lawsuits against opposition figures. ❧

Any admission that poverty might exist in Hungary had no place in socialist ideology. SZETA, the Fund Against Poverty, was set up in November 1979 by former sociology students of István Kemény and Gábor Iványi, a Methodist minister. The police treated the body as an illegal organisation on the ground that socialist civic law had expunged the very institution of charitable foundation. SZETA's aim was to provide monthly payments to anyone in Hungarian society who, though the poorest and most discriminated against, had fallen through the state safety net. As time went by, they used a wide range of drives—charity exhibitions, sales, auctions, collections—to channel attention towards poverty. ❧



CSABA HABIK

"Take What You Need Market" organised by the Fund Against Poverty (SZETA) at the House of Culture of the Ganz Works. Budapest, January 1989.

ZOLTÁN FEJÉR

Samizdat publications on sale at the corner of the József Boulevard and Blaha Lujza Square. Budapest, March 1989.

Smog. Budapest, January 1989.

ZOLTÁN FEJER

In January 1989 smog shrouded Budapest for almost a month. The air-polluting cloud of smoke was primarily due to the extensive use of heating fuels and to automobile emissions. An end product from exhaust gases—oxides of carbon, nitrogen and sulphur—mixed with dust and soot, smog can have serious health consequences, such as fatal attacks of asthma and episodes of pulmonary oedema. The number of vehicles with two-stroke engines was very high in Hungary during the Eighties. East German Trabant and Wartburg cars and Barkas minibuses were the most highly polluting of all, with over 60,000 registered in the country by the time of the change (3,026,099 Trabants alone were made in the German Democratic Republic [DDR] between 1957 and 1991). No smog alerts were ordered in Hungary at the time, but this is when pollution statistics were first made public. Reports began to feature in TV programmes, and protest movements drew attention to the problem. (Budapest issued a smog alert on 13 January 2009 affecting many central areas in the capital.) ❧

IMRE PROHÁSZKA

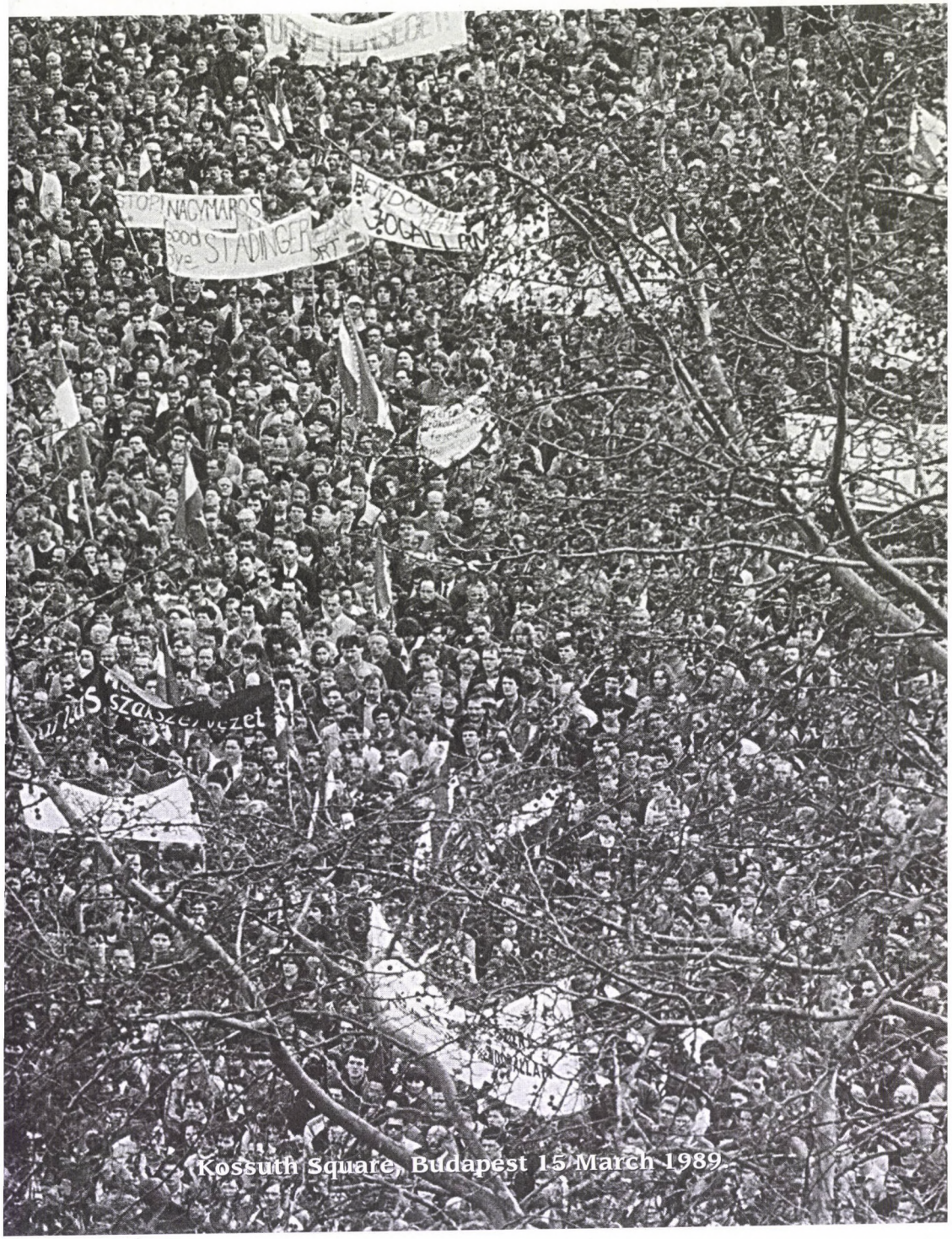
The Hungarian Democratic Forum (MDF) was founded on 27 September 1987. A total of 181 people took part in an officially authorised meeting on the subject of "Hungary's prospects" in the garden of Sándor Lezsák's house in Lakitelek. Hungary's opposition was bipolar from the start, with the Alliance of Free Democrats (SZDSZ) emerging from the hitherto banned opposition

ANDRÁS BÁNKUTI

First national assembly of the Hungarian Democratic Forum, held in the main hall of the Karl Marx University of Economics with the concealed statue of Marx (since renamed Corvinus University; it is still in place). Budapest, 11–12 March 1989.

movements that reflected a liberal, Western-oriented current, while the MDF represented the Christian-Democrat, rural-nationalist tradition. At the MDF's first national assembly in March 1989, an introductory address was delivered by future prime minister József Antall. This led to a debate about the necessity for, and the timing and manner of, constituting the Forum as a political party. At that point, the organisation had 13,200 members in 159 town and 208 rural branches. The party was officially founded in June 1989. ❧


IDE
FIATAL DEMOKRATÁK



Kossuth Square, Budapest 15 March 1989.

Actor György Cserhalmi reading out the 12-point list of demands of the democratic opposition from the steps of Hungarian Television's headquarters in Szabadság Square. Budapest, 15 March, 1989.

It was on 15 March that the 1848 Hungarian revolution broke out. Ever since, this date has signified the expression of national pride and the desire for independence. From the 1960s on, the authorities, wishing to assume ownership of this commemoration, introduced a block of three festivities, bizarrely called "The Three Springs"—the Day of the Revolutionary Young (15 March), the day celebrating the proclamation of the 1919 Soviet Republic of Hungary (21 March), and Liberation Day (4 April), which many Hungarians considered marked the beginning of the country's oppression by the Soviet Union. Young people however showed less and less inclination to participate in officially regulated festivities, preferring to commemorate on their own terms. In 1973, for the first time, police violently broke up a peaceful assembly of young people (mostly university students) in March 15th Square on the Pest bank of the Danube, where a statue of Sándor Petőfi had long marked the place where the poet gave a speech setting off the "March Youth" in 1848. By the Eighties, 15 March demonstrations by young people were regularly concentrated in three locations: the Petőfi statue, Bem Square (the destination of the march that set off the 1956 revolution), and the Batthyány Sanctuary Lamp (commemorating Lajos Batthyány, prime minister after Hungary's 1848 declaration of independence, who was subsequently executed by the Austrians) close to Liberty Square. The demonstrations regularly ended in violent police

reprisals. In 1989, in response to national calls from newly emergent democratic bodies, a crowd of several hundred thousand marched through the streets of Budapest in order to pledge their allegiance to independence and democracy, the two main ideals of 1848. Addressing the crowd from the steps of Hungarian Television's headquarters in Liberty Square, a string of speakers demanded genuine freedom of speech. The demonstration's organisers refused an MSZMP proposal to mark the day with a joint celebration. The official version of events reported by Hungarian TV and radio, even at this late stage, was incomplete and misleading. ❧

ZOLTÁN FEJÉR

Rosette-wearing policeman in Batthyány Square. Budapest, 15 March 1989.

Kossuth Square, Budapest, 15 March 1989.

The withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from the country's territory was a recurring demand of the opposition. The demonstrators above brandish placards with the words "Go home fast" "You are welcome as tourists" and, in the centre, "Comrades, it's over". That placard was designed by István Orosz for the Hungarian Democratic Forum and has become famous. Székesfehérvár, 15 March 1989.

After the French Revolution, the use of a tricolour became widespread across Europe as an expression of national identity. The red-white-green tricolour did not become a firmly established emblem in Hungary until the 1848–49 revolution and war of independence, when it was a symbol of nationalist sentiment in a country that longed to break free from Habsburg rule. After Hungary lost its war of independence, the wearing of any badge displaying the national tricolour was forbidden until the Compromise reached with Franz Joseph and the establishment of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1867. During Hungary's brief period as a Soviet Republic in 1919, the red of the proletariat and international labour movement was favoured over red, white and green. After the Second World War, the wearing of rosettes was allowed as a decoration at official celebrations, even under the hardline Rákosi regime as well as during the softer Kádár eras, but it was generally regarded as signifying a wish to break away from the Soviet Union and seen as a symbol of independence. ❧

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1989

The imminent collapse of the economy created the mood music to Hungary's political struggles. The party-state system itself was at the root of the problems, according to the opposition. The only route to recovery was to put a new government on a sound constitutional footing, armed with democratic legitimacy and free of ideological constraints. Further, it should allow the operation of the market. The looming shadow of a crisis put both sides in an awkward position: the opposition could not be certain that a collapse might not bury the slow emergence of mass support for democratic change, whereas the authorities were well aware—given Gorbachev's stated position—that the Soviet Union was not going to bail them out. Peaceful transition seemed to be the key: the parties had no option but to reach a settlement.

On 12 January 1989, the parliament of Hungary's single-party state passed Law II/1989 dealing with the right of assembly, which began the process of creating the legal basis for a multi-party system. On 28 January, Imre Pozsgay, then Minister of State, was the first party figure to refer to the events of 1956 as a "popular uprising" rather than using the official party label of "counter-revolution". The party leadership bowed to a reformist transformation by consensus and entered talks with the opposition on that basis. The Opposition Roundtable ran from 22 March 1989 to 27 April 1990, setting up initially eight and later, from the summer, nine working groups. ❧

ANDRÁS BÁNKUTI

The opening of talks between the ruling Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (MSZMP) and the parties of the Opposition Roundtable. Budapest, 22 March 1989.

JUDIT MÜLLER

Village shops selling electronic goods on the Austrian side of the border prepare to be 'besieged' by Hungarian shoppers, April 1989.

From February 1988, in addition to the $382 that they were already entitled to purchase every third year, Hungarian citizens were permitted—with certain provisos—to hold dollars privately. By the autumn of that year, an onslaught started in the direction of the Austrian border as shopping tourism got under way, further fuelled by the introduction of a "world passport" (i.e. placing no restriction on which or how many countries could be visited). In 1989, the national holiday of 4 April fell on a Tuesday, and an estimated half a million Hungarians set off abroad. Between September 1988 and April 1989, the number of Hungarians crossing the borders grew to 14 million, of whom six million went to Austria. Some 80 per cent of the five million Hungarian citizens had drawn their hard-currency quota by November 1989, placing a further $1.5 billion strain on the Treasury. The shoppers went primarily for durable consumer goods such as refrigerators, hi-fi and radio-cassette equipment, or bulk purchases of commodities. Villages along the Austrian side of the frontier, along with the cheaper shopping streets in Vienna, employed Hungarian-speaking staff and put Hungarian labels on goods. ❧

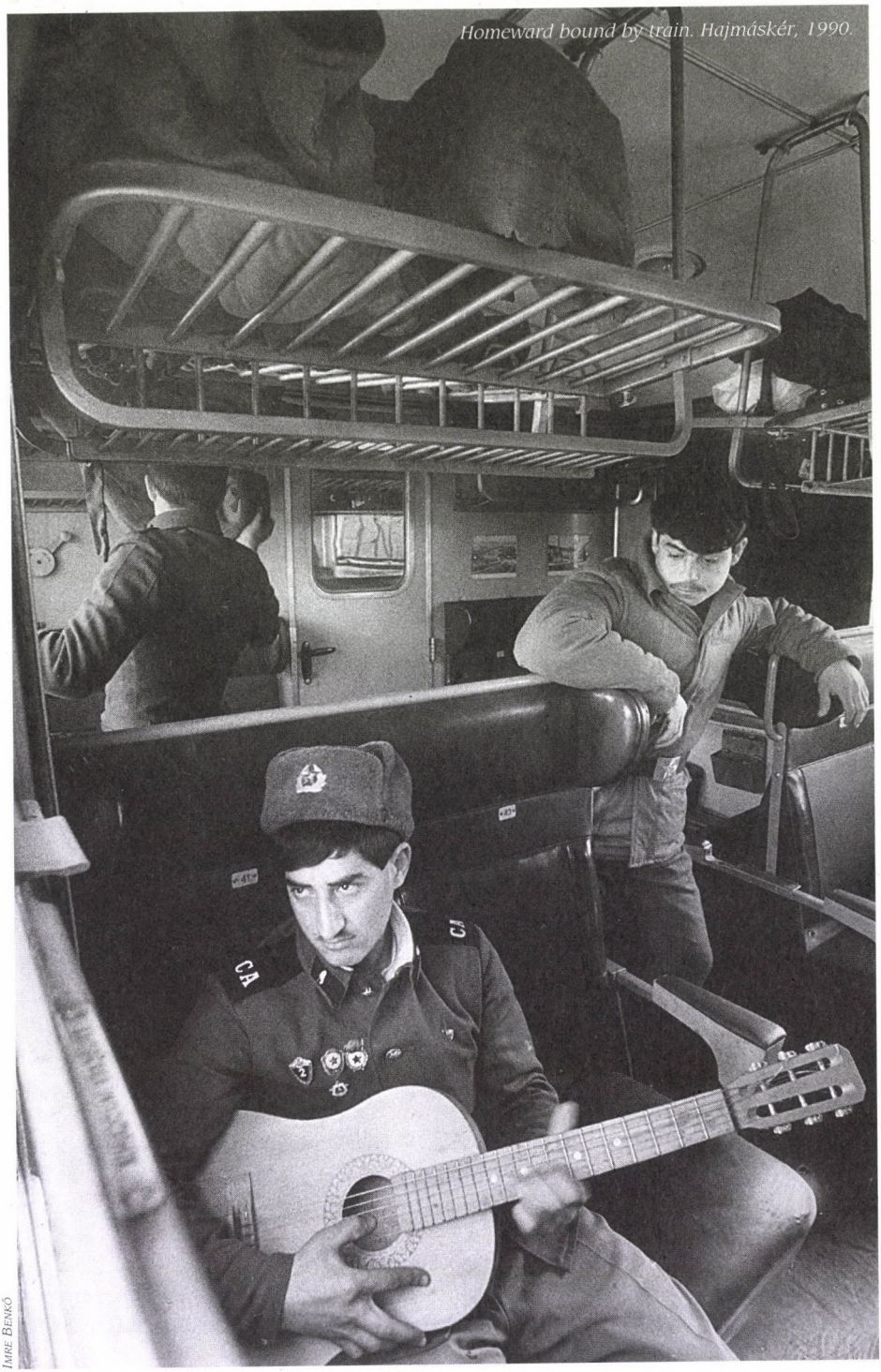
Yugoslav-manufactured Gorenje refrigerators strapped to the roofs of cars queuing to return to Hungary at the Nickelsdorf–Hegyeshalom border post at the Austro–Hungarian frontier, 4 April 1989.

IMRE PROHÁSZKA

Mikhail Gorbachev, General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, announced in December 1988 a partial withdrawal of Soviet armed forces from Hungary. On 1 February 1989, Boris Stukalin, Soviet ambassador to Budapest, issued a press release that the first units would be leaving in April. Károly Grósz, then the General Secretary of the Party, and Prime Minister Miklós Németh confirmed, while on a visit to Moscow, that the withdrawal of the first units of "the Southern Army Group temporarily stationed in Hungary" would be led by the tank corps garrisoned in Kiskunhalas, to be followed in May by 600 men and 50 T-64 tanks of the 13th Armoured Division. (The country had been continuously occupied by Soviet forces since 1945, an occupation confirmed by the Warsaw Pact in 1955. The phrase "temporarily stationed" was the subject of innumerable jokes.) Some 12,000 of the total of 65,000 men, 500 tanks, 270 artillery pieces and over 3,000 transport vehicles based in the country had left by the end of 1989. The final troop withdrawals took place in the spring of 1990. Opposition parties and reformers among the ranks of MSZMP members considered the achievement of neutrality, and thereby the restoration of sovereignty, to be the supreme goal of Hungary's diplomacy. ❧

Russian tank units move out from Kiskunhalas on 11 April 1989, marking the start of the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Hungary.

CSABA HABIK



Homeward bound by train. Hajmáskér, 1990.

IMRE BENKÓ

László Borhi

A Reluctant and Fearful West

1989 and Its International Context

From 1945 to 1990, Hungary was part of the Soviet Union's buffer zone that extended from the Baltic states to the Balkans, a zone in which Moscow had imposed clones of the Stalinist political system after 1945. It was a zone of political, military and economic interest, containing Marxist-Leninist client states whose leadership equated national interest with that of the world Communist movement and the Soviet Union. They performed imperial services—economic and military—for the Soviet Union. Hungary's sovereignty was usurped by the Soviet Union, which possessed unconstrained control of its foreign policy and its territory for military purposes. Initially Hungary, like other countries in the zone, constituted Soviet economic space and supplied the imperial centre with financial resources and raw materials. In later years the Soviet Union loosened its economic stranglehold but still kept Hungary in its commercial and economic orbit. The first ten years of Soviet rule in Hungary can be described as the most flagrant form of foreign control and dominance. From the 1960s, economic relations became somewhat more equal and Soviet control of Hungarian bilateral relations with the Western world was relaxed. However, the country remained under Soviet hegemony and was firmly embedded in the Soviet-imposed military and economic alliances, the Warsaw Pact and Comecon.

Impending economic collapse, the fatal weakening of the Soviet Union and domestic changes that were rapidly spiralling out of control weakened the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party (HSWP), which itself was split over the right course to take. But there were few options and concessions snowballed, each one leading to the next. The mushrooming of opposition movements, whose popular base grew exponentially from 1987, led first to the reintroduction of the multi-party system, then to the acceptance of free elections—which automatically entailed the renunciation of the monopoly of power by the party that had

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controlled and ruled the country since 1945. In an eventually successful effort to save itself, the reformers reinvented themselves and created a new formation that claimed to break with the past. Rapid and fundamental economic change was unavoidable: Hungary's debt trap had finally closed on the regime, with the estimation that by 1990 Hungary would be unable to service its debt. After flirtation with a fictitious notion called market socialism, it became clear that nothing short of capitalism could save the country from impending catastrophe. Transparency, the liberation of the press from a half-century of totalitarian shackles, shook the foundations of the regime by revealing the crimes committed by the police state. There was a deluge of previously banned writings of all political hues. Last but not least, Communist political legitimacy rested on the myth that the uprising of 1956 had been a counter-revolution. This was shattered when a representative of the regime itself, Imre Pozsgai, publicly declared that 1956 had been a popular uprising.

However, from an external perspective the changes were taking place rapidly, even too rapidly. Might this not lead to a new 1956? Might not transformation turn into collapse and lead not to an orderly democracy but to an abyss? What was being brought into question was the foundations of the post-war international order. With the opposition and even Communist reformers raising the issue of Hungarian neutrality, might not the Warsaw Pact and with it European peace and security collapse?

What I wish to examine here is the attitude of the Soviet Union and the Western powers to the regime change in Hungary during that crucial year of 1989. The examination is primarily based on recently released documents in the Hungarian archives which reveal what Soviet and Western politicians told Hungarians about their attitude towards transition. It will be argued that there was a meeting of minds between Moscow and the West that the foundations of the Yalta structures should survive, albeit on a cooperative basis. As NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs put it in November 1989, the "Warsaw Pact [...] could well perform useful functions and enhance stability" if reformed on the basis of strict equality.[1] From early 1989, Hungarian officials had pushed for a radical transformation of the Warsaw Pact's decision-making process. But opposition parties began to question membership of the Pact early on in the year and top-level Hungarian officials broached the issue of neutrality in September. Quitting the pact enjoyed tremendous support: it would symbolise the regaining of sovereignty.

Few predicted in January 1989 that by the end of the year Hungarians would be at the forefront of the dismantling of the Iron Curtain. As the year began, reformers within the ruling party and the democratic opposition were split as to how far it was desirable or even possible to go towards full democratisation and the restoration of national sovereignty. Although the Soviet leadership had seemingly reconciled itself to democratisation, renounced the Brezhnev doctrine and agreed to a partial troop withdrawal, Gorbachev was unready for the unification of the continent, or to give up Moscow's military and economic control of Hungary, and was wary of the infiltration of Western influence.

The West faced a dilemma. Fundamental political and economic changes were required in Hungary to avoid massive unrest, which in turn could throw the country into disarray with unforeseeable consequences for regional stability. But if changes spiralled out of control the consequences could be dire. Thus the West supported transformation along a tightrope: going far enough to satisfy the domestic appetite for democracy and to stave off economic collapse, but stopping short of upsetting the international status quo and thus peace and stability in Europe. In July 1989, the deputy head of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Central Committee's foreign relations department, Imre Szokai, summed up the Hungarian perception of Western attitudes:

> it is the firm view of our West European partners that to preserve European stability and the historically evolved status quo there should be no regime change in Hungary, Hungarian politics should not impinge upon the Soviet Union's security, military and political interests (they consider even mention of exit from the Warsaw Pact a dangerous fiction). [...] The activities of [US] ambassador Mark Palmer and his associates are in stark contrast to this.[2]

But Palmer's activity did not necessarily reflect the views of his government. He later admitted to having had "differences of opinion with some members of the Bush administration about how aggressively an ambassador could support the opposition".[3] Although Washington's grand strategy was "to end the Cold War and the division of Europe through the peaceful, democratic transformation of the eastern half", in its practical implementation US policy was cautious and not all that different from the European approach. Reforms outpaced even the boldest objectives.[4] For example, the Bush administration envisaged a transition period of some years to full democracy. This was in tune with the situation in Hungary up to around mid-1989.

Soviet moves were hard to predict. Although Gorbachev had repeatedly suggested that the Brezhnev doctrine, maintaining Communist Parties' monopoly on power and adherence to the Warsaw Pact, would not apply, his statements were not sufficiently unambiguous to be entirely relied upon.[5] Moreover, some elements of the Soviet elite were known to deplore the "loss" of Eastern Europe.[6] The threat of Soviet intervention influenced American thinking.[7] Although successful Hungarian reforms could help *perestroika,* the loss of Eastern Europe could lead to Gorbachev's removal, which in turn could end reform and Moscow's rapprochement with the West. The retraction of Soviet power, which safeguarded regional stability, could have adverse consequences—such as the reappearance of regional conflict or even the resurgence of German hegemony. Rapid changes in the East could hinder the Western integration process. Ultimately the preservation of stability prevailed in Western thinking.

Soviet and Hungarian visions of the future diverged and Hungary pushed for fundamental change in bilateral relations. The time seemed ripe for such a transformation. In the summer of 1988 Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze admitted defeat in the Cold War:

> The West beat us in all important fields, we are unable to bear the burden of the continual arms race [...] Halting the arms race has absolute priority, we must use every occasion to reach agreements.[8]

Mikhail Gorbachev hoped that Budapest would "solve its problems by better utilising the possibilities of socialism"[9] and he still wanted to "demonstrate the superiority of socialism".[10] What the Soviets failed to realise was that the *ancien régime* could be discarded altogether. In July 1989, when the multi-party system had already been recognized, Anatoly Dobrynin confided that the Soviet leadership had not even considered the possibility of a coalition government in Hungary.[11] Was Eastern Europe still an asset? CPSU (Communist Party of the Soviet Union) analysts thought that trade with Eastern Europe "greatly favoured" the Soviet Union.[12] Moreover, Hungary suffered from a large and growing Soviet trade deficit in transferable roubles. But converting the system to US dollars, as proposed by the Hungarians, could produce a crippling Hungarian deficit of 1.2 billion dollars within a year. Hungary depended on Soviet energy, but bilateral trade seemed a zero-sum game. As CPSU analysts argued in early 1989:

> From the outset [the socialist states] formed a security zone, which provided strategic defence for the centre of socialism. Today [...] the role of Eastern Europe remains essentially the same,[13]

The previous year Gorbachev had announced unilateral troop reductions in East-Central Europe and the western military districts of the Soviet Union. This coincided with Hungary's own (budget-dictated) decision in March 1989 to reduce its own forces and a party resolution on May 16 to push for Soviet troop withdrawal. But Gorbachev protested that the proposed reduction was hasty and should be a function of the Vienna arms reduction talks. The same applied to Soviet troop reductions. In Vienna, Hungary pushed for the reduction of Hungarian forces and Soviet withdrawal. Although it seemed that the Soviet military "no longer regarded the stationing of troops in adjacent states a prerequisite of security," the Soviet position shifted only slowly.[14] In March Gorbachev rejected the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, which he sought to retain on a democratised basis.[15] Soviet Deputy Foreign Minister Ivan Aboimov regarded "the presence of Soviet troops in Hungary an important guarantee of European security" and was worried by demands for their complete withdrawal.[16] Soviet Defence Minister Dmitrii Iazov asserted that the Warsaw Pact was "the only guarantee" of European stability and would "remain strong, irrespective of developments in Eastern Europe".[17]

Gorbachev's "common European home" did not envisage European reunification as it ultimately unfolded. In April 1989, high-ranking MID (the Soviet Ministry of Foreign Affairs) officials explained that Gorbachev's vision was built on "respect for European political and territorial realities, [and] maintenance of the alliances" based on cooperation. The German question would be solved on the basis of a common German identity but on two German states.[18] In briefing the Warsaw Pact allies on the Malta summit, Gorbachev declared that although there was an

> objective need for efforts to overcome the division of Europe, [it was] unacceptable to realise unity based on the liquidation of socialism and exclusively on the basis of Western values, the replacement of the Brezhnev doctrine with a sort of Bush doctrine."[19]

Thus the initiative for liberation had to come from outside the Soviet Union.

Neutral Austria, which had built a close relationship with Kádár's Hungary, was sensitive to challenges to Soviet control because of its precarious geographical position, the proximity of Soviet forces and its vulnerability to a potential flood of refugees. Only two days after the HSWP Central Committee (recognising a *fait accompli*) made its historic decision on 11 February 1989 to accept a multi-party system and a re-evaluation of the 1956 Revolution (effectively removing the ruling party's legitimacy), the Hungarian Prime Minister Miklós Németh explained to the Austrian Chancellor Franz Vranitzky that Hungary would introduce democracy and a "socialist market system". Vranitzky stated that "the danger of domestic changes in Hungary spiralling out of control causes great anxiety in the Austrian leadership."[20] The Hungarian Foreign Ministry learned that the then governing Austrian Socialist Party was baffled and deeply troubled by the discussion of neutrality and the question of 1956 underway in Hungary, and was sceptical about the possibility of "real elections".[21] The Austrian opposition politician Friedhelm Frischenschlager stated that "European stability rested on the status quo."[22] Austrians emphasised Gorbachev's precarious position and the dire consequences of his potential removal.

Aside from the president of the Wiener Allianz, Ernst Baumgartner, who advocated Hungary's return to the principles of Leninism, Austrians recommended slow and predictable democratisation.[23] The general secretary of the Austrian Foreign Ministry, Thomas Klestil, queried Hungary's foreign minister, Gyula Horn, about the limits of transformation and whether these limits would lead to tension with the Soviet Union. Austrians feared the ramifications of change. Their foreign minister, Alois Mock, was concerned that the Hungarian decision in February to remove the border fences would mean an increase in the number of East European refugees arriving in Austria. Growing financial burdens could lead Austria to alter its refugee policy.[24] By mid-summer, Austrian socialists were expressing anxiety that the HSWP might collapse and anarchy would set in, seeing this as a danger just as real as the reversal of reforms. Their message, as reported by the Hungarian embassy in Vienna, was that "Hungary should not cause a headache for Europe again."[25] Austrian views remained unchanged throughout the year. A spokesman of the Austrian right-of-centre People's Party reiterated that the Soviet Union and the stationing of Soviet troops abroad were important factors in stabilising Eastern Europe, a statement likely prompted by rumours of an impending Romanian attack on Hungary.[26]

Austria took part in the Quadragonale initiative launched by Italy in Budapest in November; this aimed at promoting regional cooperation between Italy, Yugoslavia, Austria and Hungary in industry, science, transport and environmental protection. The Italian foreign minister, Gianni De Michelis, saw this as Italy's way of helping the region to find its place in the common European home. However, the project, despite Soviet and American blessing, was not entirely altruistic. Harking back to the old rivalry between Rome and Berlin, an Italian official explained in mid-October that it was "more advantageous for Hungary to use Italy's mediation towards the EC than Germany's". One must take into account, he argued, the problems with the balance of power which may arise "once Germany

is unified."[27] The Hungarians were receptive, but problems arose with Yugoslavia and Austria at an early stage. In 1990, the Quadragonale was broadened into a Pentagonale involving Czechoslovakia as a fifth partner, but the initiative petered out.[28]

The Hungarian Archives contain little evidence on Bonn's policies towards the security and political aspects of the transition. Through its *Ostpolitik,* Bonn had built close relations with Budapest. German economic activity was particularly strong and the Federal Republic became Hungary's largest Western trading partner. Bonn's approach paid off in 1989 when the Németh administration drove a nail into the German Democratic Republic's coffin by allowing East German citizens who had decided not to return home to cross Hungary's western border into the West.[29] This move was not intended to secure economic favours, which Budapest counted on and received, but as a test case of Hungary's democratisation. In June, a German–Soviet joint declaration was issued, which affirmed the principle of self-determination and a commitment to overcome the division of Europe. A commitment to self-determination had already been made and Gorbachev's notion of European unity was probably different from that of Chancellor Kohl, who on June 12 declared that Germany would not destabilise Poland or Hungary by intervening in their affairs. Two days later Kohl outlined his position on Hungary: Hungarians "should not accelerate events, because they could lose control over them and the system would terminate itself".[30] When Horn broached the question of Soviet troop withdrawal on the occasion of the German chancellor's visit to Budapest in December 1989, Kohl did not express an opinion on the topic.[31]

Rather more information is available on French policies. Robert Hutchings has observed that "Eastern Europe had little place in the French strategic vision except as part of the distant goal of a Europe free of the superpowers."[32] The French historian Thomas Schreiber has written that some French political circles were not enthusiastic after the Polish elections and the opening of Hungarian borders to East Germans and that President Mitterrand himself remained cautious.[33] Both of these judgments are supported by Hungarian documentary evidence. Only briefly had Eastern Europe ever played a pivotal role in French policies. From 1920, Paris supported the Little Entente to safeguard France's eastern security against Germany and Russia, but without providing explicit security guarantees.[34] From the mid-1930s the French backed away from the constellation they had created in Eastern Europe. Although the 1960s saw renewed French interest in the region, Paris was not about to take responsibility for it and the French were far less active economically in Eastern Europe than West Germany. Mitterrand turned down Kohl's offer for a common policy towards the region, even though France was wary of German designs in the eastern half of the continent. Paris may have found it too risky to support changes that threatened to upset stability behind the Iron Curtain. Domestic changes there had to satisfy the criteria of stability and predictability.

Initially Mitterrand was forward-looking. In November 1988, he talked to the HWSP's First Secretary Károly Grósz about the need to transcend Yalta and for Europeans to decide on their own fate. Mitterrand emphasised the need for cooperation "against American cultural expansionism on the wings of Japanese technology".[35] This was perhaps a hint that

it was more important to rid France of the US than to rid the East of the Soviets. In early 1989, French business circles began to take an active interest in Hungary. Although the Hungarian estimation was that France recognised the economic inroads that Germany was making, not even a symbolic measure was taken to facilitate Hungarian exports to France.[36] The French response to the abolition of the single-party system was cautious. It was reported that because of the anxiety exhibited by political circles regarding the pace of reform, the French company Matra cancelled its plans to create a joint venture in Hungary.[37] On February 15, Mitterrand's advisor, Loïc Hennekine, told Hungarian diplomat László Vass that Paris supported Hungary's reforms, but did not want these to destabilise the continent, or to lead to a political and economic crisis.[38] A Hungarian summary of French views emphasised that they deplored "demagogic" demands such as Hungary's exit from the Warsaw Pact. Paris did not understand why, in contrast to Poland, the government backed down against the opposition. A more gradual, predictable reform process was required.[39] Although Jacques Attali opined that in ten years' time Hungary might become a member of the European Community, on 28 February 1989 the French minister in charge of planning, Lionel Stoleru, told the president of the Hungarian National Planning Office, Ernő Kemenes, that the EC wanted to become a bastion in the economic struggle against the US and Japan and that therefore transition in the East should not impede the strong union of the twelve member states. A rapid acceleration of the reforms in Eastern Europe, Stoleru thought, would lead to catastrophe.[40]

In October, the HSWP was dissolved and the party-state system that had existed in Hungary since 1948 came to an end. The rapid collapse of the Communists alarmed the French Socialist Party, which expressed the view that the victory of the right was not in the interests of Western Europe or Hungary.[41] On November 17, the general secretary at the Elysée, Jean-Louis Bianco, explained that Western assistance to Hungary should not interfere with Hungarian–Soviet relations. The Soviets had clarified the limits of East European change, which were the continued existence of the alliances and the inviolability of boundaries, conditions that the US and Western Europe accepted.[42] Director of the Quai d'Orsay Jacques Blot described the dangers of an exclusive German orientation to a Hungarian diplomat, arguing that France could provide the right political, cultural and economic counterbalance.[43] In early December, former French president Valéry Giscard d'Estaing met Imre Pozsgay. Giscard claimed to agree with Mitterrand that the transition period in Hungary would be lengthy. But membership in the EC required compatible economies and membership of NATO, which according to Giscard ruled out even Austria's entry.[44]

It was apparent to Hungarians that France wanted slow and limited change. According to a briefing on Mitterrand's talks in the GDR that the Hungarians received from the French Embassy in East Berlin, Mitterrand regarded unification a German matter but preferred to maintain the GDR's international status. Unification should not lead to destabilisation in Europe or border changes.[45] In Budapest in January 1990, while his Hungarian hosts underlined the importance of French support for the transition, Mitterrand declared that he came to give an impetus to bilateral relations and to discuss the future of Europe. Earlier, he argued,

Europe had been under the "tutelage" of Great Powers, but the Bush–Gorbachev meeting in Malta offered the opportunity to transcend this. Since 1945, there had been no stable continental balance, and this would have to be rectified through negotiation. German unification was unavoidable, but should not be hastened. It would take at least ten years to build a European confederation. Political and legal arrangements would have to be made between the two halves of Europe to guarantee security and economic cooperation.[46] Thus the Soviet bloc would survive at least temporarily. In this respect there had been no change in Mitterrand's position since 1988.

Alongside France, Britain had been the architect of the inter-war order in Central Europe. London had sought to balance the French presence in the region, had tried unsuccessfully to identify a state on which to build British regional policy but had soon become disenchanted with the successor states and abandoned an active regional role.[47] As Geraint Hughes has shown,

> traditional British policy towards Eastern Europe [...] emphasised stability rather than self-determination [...] violent uprisings [...] could have a dangerous impact on European security."[48]

In 1989, London perceived similar threats if the reforms went too far. Hutchings argues that "British thinking [...] saw few prospects for meaningful change and many dangers for the cohesion of the West."[49] Geoffrey Howe, the Foreign Secretary, admitted that changes in Eastern Europe raised a number of strategic issues, primarily in Western policies towards the Soviet Union.[50] Initially London suggested that Hungarian reforms might improve Gorbachev's chances. Margaret Thatcher, who had been sceptical about Kádár's reforms, told Hungary's Foreign Minister Péter Várkonyi in mid-March 1989 that the success of Hungarian *perestroika* could influence Gorbachev's choices and serve as a model for the Soviet Union.[51] The British prime minister claimed to have told Gorbachev that Hungary was a showcase for socialist transformation.[52] The phrase "socialist transformation", a term used by the conservative wing of the reform Communists in Hungary, suggested that Thatcher was mindful of Soviet concerns. A few days earlier the British ambassador in Budapest had asked opposition leaders to be more patient with the Hungarian leadership and not cause unnecessary complications.[53] In September, Thatcher assured Gorbachev of her sympathy with the Soviet position according to which reform in Eastern Europe should not question the Warsaw Pact.[54] In acknowledging Soviet primacy in Eastern Europe, the prime minister was acting in the traditions of British policy towards that region since 1944. The Hungarians were told that European stability rested on Soviet security, which enjoyed priority over reforms in Eastern Europe. The Foreign Office expressed Thatcher's cautious views even more emphatically.

On October 11, Foreign Office officials explained that the future of Eastern Europe depended on progress in the Soviet Union, which was the most dangerous state in Eastern Europe and hence needed, for the good of all, to feel secure. The dissolution of the Warsaw Pact would increase the Soviet sense of insecurity and be unpredictable in its outcome. Therefore Britain attributed great significance to regional stability and advised the reform

states to be cautious: too many things should not be changed at once, although London hoped to provide economic assistance to Poland and Hungary. The question was how this could be done without jeopardising mutual security. Finally the British declared their hope for the presence of reform Communists Pozsgay, Németh and Horn in a coalition government after the election, which could then expect London's support, just like Solidarity in Poland had received.[55] On November 27–28, the Hungarian State Secretary of Foreign Affairs, László Kovács, met William Waldgrave, David Ratford and Percy Cradock in preparation for Németh's meeting with Thatcher. The Prime Minister's dilemma, they informed Kovács, was how to help reform without "causing problems for Gorbachev". Changes had to be "peaceful and evolutionary" so as not to endanger European stability. They claimed that in her recent talks with President Bush, Thatcher had argued that in order to offset the uncertainty caused by the rapid change in Eastern Europe, the two military alliances needed to be preserved while broadening their contacts. Concerning the EC, Thatcher's proposal was a treaty of association for Hungary, but full membership would depend upon a long-term change of European structures.[56]

At their meeting on 13 December 1989, Németh claimed that this was the first occasion when it was unlikely that Moscow would intervene. The most important thing, he thought, was for Gorbachev to succeed. Although he was under fire, "the KGB and the army stands behind him." Németh pleaded for Western assistance in the transition, which otherwise would stand no chance. Hungary's success could bolster Gorbachev and reforms in other socialist states, while failure could worsen the situation. Németh expressed his gratitude to Thatcher and President Bush for avoiding even the semblance of profiting from the developments in Eastern Europe. Németh was grateful for a Western policy that eschewed strident rhetoric—in contrast to 1956—but this did not mean that he liked being told to stay in the Warsaw Pact. It is no coincidence that he tried to persuade Thatcher (and later Bush) that Moscow would not intervene. Had the Hungarian public known about the Western stance on the preservation of the status quo, there would have been an outcry.

Thatcher stated that Gorbachev needed Hungary as a positive example against that of Poland, which in her view was heading for crisis due to its catastrophic economic state. She emphasised the need for a "responsible" Hungarian opposition. British aid took the form of a £25 million know-how fund.[57] According to a Hungarian appraisal in early 1990, London was still worried about destabilisation stemming from radical changes in Eastern Europe and emphasised that stability was to be preserved by the two alliances, Soviet security concerns being recognised as legitimate.[58] In early 1990, Foreign Minister Gyula Horn told his British counterpart Douglas Hurd that Hungary was "looking for a new, realistic framework of security" with neutrality being a viable option since the Soviet Union no longer offered an "adequate guarantee" given the uncertainty prevailing there. Hurd emphasised the importance of NATO in guaranteeing a US presence in Europe and in constraining Germany, something which was a "European interest".[59]

Just like its member states, the European Commission groped for an appropriate response to the eastern challenge. In January, Jacques Delors, the Commission

President, talked about the advantages of a single European market. On the subject of the common European home, Giovanni Januzzi, who headed the EC Secretariat for Political Cooperation, told the Hungarian ambassador in Brussels that the EC had no intention of "surrendering its own building".[60] The Community sent mixed signals. At the G7 summit in July it was decided that the European Commission would coordinate aid to Poland and Hungary offered by the G24. Simultaneously, Januzzi outlined EC expectations for Hungary, welcoming its rapprochement with the Community without expecting it to "eschew socialism" and to adopt "wild capitalism". Hungary could have a Communist-led government alongside membership in the WTO on the lines of French participation in NATO. For the sake of European stability, Januzzi claimed, it was Hungary's "obligation" to remain in the Warsaw Pact.[61] In the same month, a Hungarian request for the removal of quantitative limitations on Hungarian exports and for a Yugoslav-type asymmetrical trade agreement was rejected. In September, the EC decided on a 300-million ECU aid package to Poland and Hungary, with a further 50 million ECUs for environmental protection. By the time of the Paris summit in November, it became clear that changes in Eastern Europe were irreversible.[62] As a result, the Phare (Poland and Hungary: Assistance to Restructure their Economies) programme was launched, a Generalised System of Preferences—lower tariffs—was given and quantitative restrictions were lifted for Hungarian industrial products. But these concessions were carefully calibrated to involve only a small number of Hungarian goods; they affected only a small percentage of exports and protected EC commodities from Hungarian competition.[63]

Early in the Cold War the US had sought to undermine Communist regimes in Eastern Europe. After 1956, the notion of liberation was discarded and gradually the Soviet occupation of Eastern Europe was accepted, even though the US never renounced democratisation as an eventual aim. Having failed in 1956, Washington was cautious. In 1972, Secretary of State William Rogers told Kádár that the US wanted to develop bilateral relations "as it suits Hungary without disturbing its relations with third countries". On February 13, 1989 President Bush committed the US to a policy that moved beyond containment. The Cold War had to end where it started, in Eastern Europe, which was elevated to the top of the international agenda on April 17. A free Eastern Europe would "reinforce further development in East–West relations and all its dimensions".[64]

Hungarian–US relations improved over the decades, but still suffered from the remnants of the Cold War: trade controls on the part of the US, espionage and illegal acquisition of technology by Budapest. Although the Hungarians desperately wanted a relaxation of Cocom restrictions as well as Most Favoured Nation status, both were denied. The American response to Hungary's critical balance of payments deficit was insensitive. Presidential envoy John Whitehead complained about the Hungarian surplus in bilateral trade. In April 1989, State Department officials told a Hungarian diplomat that Hungary "could not count on large financial support from the US even though political developments could possibly justify it".[65]

Budapest understood that Washington expected predictable, gradual and peaceful change. Deputy Secretary of State Lawrence Eagleburger praised

Hungarian boldness in opening the Austrian border and expressed sympathy for its reforms.[66] US sources nevertheless suggested that Washington expected changes to remain under control. Moscow's tolerance limit was thought to be unpredictable.[67] In May, Bush's visit to Warsaw and Budapest was announced. Soviet reactions were mixed. Shevardnadze welcomed the visit and declared that Moscow would respect the rights of nations to choose their own path.[68] But an article in the Soviet army's periodical *Krasnaya Zvezda* of 12 May accused the US of "driving a wedge between the socialist countries", of "trying to alter the balance of power on the continent" and of "casting doubt on European realities".[69] In a private message on July 4, Gorbachev asked Bush to be "more considerate if he wants to help".[70]

In his dramatic visit to Budapest, Bush stressed non-intervention. The Chairman of the HSWP, Rezső Nyers argued that not since 1947 had Hungary had such freedom of manoeuvre. Németh claimed that the "Brezhnev doctrine is dead" and said that Hungarian reforms could strengthen Gorbachev's hand. According to the Hungarian records Bush declared, in line with what other Western leaders were saying, that he "did not mean to cause *problems for Gorbachev* (emphasis added) or the Hungarian leadership and has no intention of interfering in the relations between Hungary and its allies".[71] In Hutchings's version Bush added, "the better we get along with the Soviets the better it is for you."[72] West European and US attitudes towards the transition in Hungary were very similar. The President met members of the opposition, who made a poor impression on him. Referring to the modest economic package, Nyers informed Gorbachev that the President's visit had "left no illusions" but that Bush emphasised American neutrality in domestic affairs.[73] In late September, Hungary's president, Mátyás Szűrös, raised the question of Hungary's neutrality with US National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft, who reiterated that the US "wanted to appear helpful but not provocative".[74]

Beside concern over the Brezhnev doctrine and *perestroika*, there was another problem. On September 13, Eagleburger warned that

> reform in the Soviet bloc and the relaxation of Soviet control over Eastern Europe are bringing long-suppressed ethnic antagonisms and natural rivalries to the surface and putting the German question back on the agenda.

Eagleburger suggested that the US would not be the key player:

> it is ultimately the Europeans themselves who have the principal stake in making the transition to a new and undivided Europe a peaceful and orderly one.[75]

Concern for regional security was not unfounded. Hungarian–Romanian relations had plummeted and on June 19, the Ministry of the Interior warned the HSWP leadership of Romanian preparations for military action against Hungary in the autumn.[76] In this light, Hungarian leaders, including future Prime Minister József Antall reaffirmed Hungary's commitment to the Warsaw Pact.[77] Antall told Aboimov that Hungary wanted "guarantees" within the alliance "against potential attack from the neighbourhood [...] we cannot exclude the danger of a [Romanian] attack". But Aboimov may have been aware that Hungary was already exploring other possibilities and warned his interlocutor that "any breach of European stability would create a

very dangerous situation."[78] In his assessment of the Malta summit, Gorbachev claimed that Bush "accepted the stabilising role of the military-political alliances [...] and caution was needed in the withdrawal of troops stationed abroad as well".[79] At Malta, Gorbachev pledged non-intervention, troop withdrawal and an opportunity for Eastern Europe to choose its own political system. In return, Bush pledged not to take advantage of the situation.[80] For the time being, European security structures would remain in place. According to State Department officials, the alliances would be "pillars of European security".[81]

In 1989, Communist rule in Hungary was on the verge of collapsing. The only way out of impending economic catastrophe and the ever-increasing domestic pressure for democratisation and the restoration of national sovereignty was for the ruling party to gradually dismantle its dictatorial rule. Archival records reveal what Western officials of various levels actually said about their policies towards Hungary. They intimated that, at least in part, the Cold War was about the retraction of Soviet power behind the Soviet Union's borders and the reunification of the continent. When the moment came Western powers saw both an opportunity and dangers ahead.

Transition from a relatively stable and predictable world to an unpredictable and possibly unstable one was risky. Despite statements in memoirs to the contrary, relations with Eastern Europe were still subordinated to policies towards the Soviet Union. Western leaders *without exception* repeated that their policies in Hungary were not meant to "cause problems for Gorbachev". Fears of German hegemony (amplified by the prospect of unification), the threat of regional chaos and conflict made a continued Soviet hegemony in a democratised and cooperative form an appealing solution. The West, while seeking a "gradual and peaceful" transition to democracy, put stability and peace before full self-determination in Eastern Europe. In the new structure, the two cooperative parts of Europe would be bound together by a network of political, economic and security arrangements, but the division would stay nonetheless. The Soviet military presence in Eastern Europe would be reduced or even eliminated, but the Warsaw Pact would continue to function.

Moscow gave repeated assurances that the Brezhnev doctrine was dead and that it tolerated democratisation, wherever it might lead. But the Soviets made it clear that they preferred it to stay within the confines of Socialism. The West was also willing to see democratic governments under reform-Communist leadership. Gorbachev hoped to preserve the Soviet bloc in a more democratic form: the Soviet leadership regarded the Warsaw Pact as a pillar of stability and peace. Strange as it may sound, in 1989, for the first time since 1945, there was a meeting of Soviet and Western minds about an important aspect of the European structure. But in the course of that year, events in Hungary and Europe moved beyond this scenario and Moscow refrained from trying to stop the process from unfolding. The West, in the face of irreversible transformation of the East European scene and German unification, would accept the eventual restoration of self-determination and a full end to Communist power in Eastern Europe. But continental reunification would be a long and painful process for the subjects of the former Iron Curtain countries. ❧

NOTES

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2 ■ MOL KS 288. f., 5. cs., 1078. őe. Proposal to the Political Executive Committee, July 1989.

3 ■ Antal Bodzabán & Antal Szalay eds., *A puha diktatúrától a kemény demokráciáig* [From Soft Dictatorship to a Hard Democracy]. Budapest: Pelikán, 1994, p. 131.

4 ■ Robert L. Hutchings, *American Diplomacy and the End of the Cold War. An Insider's Account of U.S. Policy in Europe, 1989–1992.* Washington, D. C., Baltimore and London: The Woodrow Wilson Center Press, The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, pp. 46–47. See also Michael R. Beschloss, Strobe Talbott, *At the Highest Levels: The Inside Story of the End of the Cold War.* Boston: Little and Brown and Company, 1993; George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York, Knopf, 1998); Tamás Magyarics, "Az Egyesült Államok és Magyarország kapcsolatai a Vasfüggöny lebontásától a Szovjetunió felbomlásáig" [Relations between the US and Hungary from the Removal of the Iron Curtain to the Collapse of the Soviet Union], in Tibor Frank ed., *Gyarmatokból impérium* [An Empire of Colonies], Budapest: Gondolat, 2007, pp. 217–235.

5 ■ Csaba Békés, *Európából Európába: Magyarország konfliktusok kereszttüzében* [From Europe to Europe: Hungary in the Crossfire of Conflicts]. Budapest: Gondolat, 2004. Békés used the apt term "floating the Brezhnev doctrine".

6 ■ Mark Kramer, "The Collapse of East European Communism and the Repercussions within the Soviet Union (Part 3)". *Journal of Cold War Studies,* Volume 7, Number 1, Vol. 2005, pp. 1–24.

7 ■ Bush–Scowcroft, *A World Transformed,* p. 36.

8 ■ MOL, KS, 288. f., 5. cs., 1032. őe., 1988. The 15–16 July 1988 Warsaw session of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty.

9 ■ Cited in Magdolna Baráth, János Rainer M. eds., *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai magyar vezetőkkel. Dokumentumok az egykori SZKP és MSZMP archívumaiból, 1985–1991* [Gorbachev's Talks with Hungarian Leaders. Documents from the Archives of the Soviet Communist Party and the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party 1985–1991]. Budapest: 1956-os Intézet, 2000, pp. 178–185.

10 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, WT 1989, Box 107, 001367/12. Gorbachev's address to the 8 July 1989 Bucarest session of the Political Consultative Committee of the Warsaw Treaty.

11 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 83, 001245/3. Report by Barabás on statements made by Palmer and Dobrynin, 25 July 1989.

12 ■ Memorandum by the International Department of the Central Committee of the Soviet Communist Party, February 1989. *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai,* pp. 250–251.

13 ■ Ibid.

14 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Europe 1989, Box 96, 00139/4. Soviet position at the Conventional Force Reduction Talks, 16 January 1989.

15 ■ Minutes of the 3 March 1989 meeting between Gorbachev and Németh. *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai,* pp. 156–168.

16 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 84, 003982. Report on a visit by Aboimov, 20 October 1989.

17 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Europe, Box 97, 00275/3. Soviet Defense Minister Iazov on the Warsaw Treaty, 23 November 1989.

18 ■ MOL, XIX-J-1-j, Moscow tük 1989, Box 84, 002112. A note on consultations in Moscow on 24 April 1989.

19 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-r, 144/HGY, Box 94. Report to the Council of Ministers on a conference of the leaders of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty on 4 December 1989.

20 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 00342/2. Report to the Council of Ministers, 15 February 1989.

21 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 001225. Austrian opinions on the changes, 21 February 1989.

22 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 001225/3. An Austrian opinion on the changes, 3 March 1989.

23 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 00225/10. Negotiations with Prattner, 25 April 1989; talks with Baumgartner, 18 April 1989.

24 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 00125. Report on a visit by Klestil on 7 March 1989.

25 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, Austria tük 1989, Box 19, 001225. Report on an Austrian opinion, 6 July 1989.
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27 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, EC 1989, Box 110, 002988/6. Report from the embassy in Rome, 10 October 1989.
28 ■ See Leopoldo Nuti's chapter.
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33 ■ Thomas Schreiber, *Les Actions de la France à L'Est ou les Absences de Marianne.* Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000, pp. 198–200.
34 ■ Magda Ádám, *The Little Entente and Europe, 1920–1929.* Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1993; Anthony Adamthwaite, *Grandeur and Misery: France's Bid for Power in Europe, 1914–1940.* London: Arnold, 1990.
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36 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, France tük 1989, Box 35, 00428. Memorandum by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, n.d. (January 1989)
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63 ■ See Pater Van Ham, *The EC, Eastern Europe and European Unity – Discord, Collaboration and Integration since 1947.* London–New York: Pinter, 1993, p. 173.

64 ■ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy;* Bush–Scowcroft, *A World Transformed.*

65 ■ MOL, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük 1989, Box 9, 00625/5. Coded telegramme from the embassy in Washington, 12 April 1989.

66 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük 1989, Box 9, 002245/3. Coded telegramme from the embassy in Washington, 11 May 1989.

67 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA tük 1989, Box 10, 0016/2. Memorandum by the embassy in Washington, 15 May 1989.

68 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 83, 001057/1. Soviet statement to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 12 May 1989.

69 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 86, 003062. Comments on an article in the *Krasnaya Zvezda,* 30 June 1989.

70 ■ Jack Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire – The American Ambassador's Account of the Collapse of the Soviet Union.* New York: Random House, 1995, p. 198.

71 ■ MOL KS 288. f. 11. cs., 4460. őe. Memorandum on a visit by Bush.

72 ■ Hutchings, *American Diplomacy,* p. 66.

73 ■ Report to the Political Executive Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party on a visit to Moscow by Nyers and Grósz on 24–25 July 1989. *Gorbacsov tárgyalásai,* p. 194.

74 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-k, USA admin 1989, Box 24, 4243-4/T. Report by the Secretariat of the Chairman of the National Assembly, 26 September 1989.

75 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, USA 1989 tük, Box 9, 001335/1989. Report by the embassy in Washington.

76 ■ MOL KS 288. f., 59. cs., 1. őe. Proposal by the International Affairs Department of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party Central Committee to the party presidency, 30 June 1989.

77 ■ As Horn put it: "[our] membership in the Warsaw Pact is not open to question". Report on a visit by Aboimov, 20 October 1989. MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 84, 003982.

78 ■ MOL, Küm, XIX-J-1-j, SU tük 1989, Box 84, 003982. Aboimov's meeting with representatives of the opposition, 17 October 1989.

79 ■ Report to the Council of Ministers on a conference of the leaders of the member states of the Warsaw Treaty, op. cit.

80 ■ Matlock, *Autopsy of an Empire,* p. 272.

81 ■ KIT, USA SZT 1990, Box 9, 0050. Negotiations between Várkonyi, Kamman, Hornblow and Swihart.

Mária Tompa

Doctor Haydn and the Biographical Fantasies of Miklós Szentkuthy

Miklós Szentkuthy: fox or hedgehog? Isaiah Berlin famously liked to think of writers as being one or the other: the fox knows many things but will not hook himself onto any one in particular, whereas the hedgehog knows one big thing and hitches the world on the coattails of a sole idea. Should Szentkuthy find himself in the company of Aristotle, Joyce and Shakespeare or Plato, Proust and Dante? One clue to the answer can be found in a passage which literary critic Pál Réz wrote in these pages. "Most artists", he said, "single out one of their character traits, faculties or potentialities, which they subsequently undertake to develop, solidify and elaborate until they constitute a personality and become the incarnation of a lifework. Szentkuthy's method was different. He was unable and unwilling to relinquish any of his potentialities. Refusing to stifle anything within himself, he sought to acquaint himself with every aspect of the universe." He appears to be very much the fox, then. Or as Réz puts it, "a Grandgousier, a Casanova and an Erasmus in one."* He does not so much don the mantle of Haydn, Dürer or Goethe, as mingles his own spirit with his apperception of theirs.

Between 1957 and 1967, five novels, or "biographical fantasies" as he called them, found their way to the bookshelves of Hungarian readers. In *Divertimento* (1957) he inhabited the spirit of Mozart, his favourite composer, before going on to take on Haydn in *Doktor Haydn* (1959), Goethe in *Arc és álarc* (Face and Mask, 1962), Dürer in *Saturnus fia* (Saturn's Son, 1966) and *Händel* (1967). He hoped that one day they would be published in a single volume under the title *Self-portrait in Masquerade.* (His historical fantasy

* ■ "A Sacred Monster: Recollections of Miklós Szentkuthy", *HQ* 179, pp. 5-6.

Mária Tompa

was Szentkuthy's secretary and co-writer for ten years up to his death. She is the writer's literary executor and president of the Miklós Szentkuthy Foundation, established in 1996. Since Szentkuthy's death, she has prepared 14 of his posthumous manuscripts for publication.

Wittenberg, which examines the lives of Lucas Cranach the Elder and Martin Luther—and this gives just a small indication of just how insatiable his appetite for arts and letters was—covers similar terrain.)

Szentkuthy already knew Haydn's music intimately before he came to write *Doktor Haydn.* At first sight, his understanding of classical form appears fanciful. A passage in *Az egyetlen metafora felé* (Towards the One and Only Metaphor), written in 1935, begins:

> Haydn sonatas and cacti: the difference between the structure of a Classical-rational "structure" and biological forms. My writings hitherto belong to the cactus category: if I have any role in literature, it will be the immediate tactility of instinct-driven biological lines and forms in my sentences.

The following passage, however, in which he castigates Romantic composers for being too dogmatic with regard to the best known classical form, sonata form, demonstrates his ability to grasp a truth instinctively without recourse to a dry academic theory.

> On more than a few occasions, Haydn treats sonata form with conspicuous abandon (he discards the main subject, etc. etc.), yet all the same I savour this as the most consummate form: the works of certain Romantic composers adhere to sonata form to the point of bigotry, yet they arouse an impression of ongoing chaos. My structure-sensing nerves are excited *not* by the structural elements of works but by their other properties.

As music historians will tell you, sonata form was not something that classical composers talked about. The form became defined in criticism only later when E.T.A. Hoffmann and later Hanslick developed theories about musical structure and sonata form became, well, formalised. Until then the rubric itself was not the main point. Indeed, the sonata form of Mozart, Haydn and Beethoven was more of a useful idea than a form. Looked at through the prism of later theories, it was the multitude of subtle ways in which these classical composers "broke" the formal "rules" that make their music works of genius. Szentkuthy appears ambivalent about the form qua form itself, but seems to understand what most musicologists will happily agree on: classical form arises from a certain sensibility, a desire to pose and counter-pose musical ideas and develop them against a tacitly understood backdrop, rather than being a stencil imposed from above. It is organic, if you will, and serves mightier purposes; an idea which Szentkuthy readily appreciated and sought to apply to his own artistic output.

When Szentkuthy approaches his subjects through his own artistic channels, the "tactile and instinct-driven" in him reap their reward. For him the fugue is "eroticism in sound a thousand times more than it is a mathematics of sound: it is the most ardent fumbling of each and every curve of a melody." Anyone struck by the painful dissonances in Bach's fugues in a sequence of suspensions might easily summon an image of Bernini's *Ecstasy of Santa Theresa* and see what

Szentkuthy is driving at. "Ardent fumbling" is not perhaps the most fortunate oxymoron to describe a Bach fugue—after all, Johann Sebastian was not, in his music at least, given to groping, however ardently. But the idea that Bach designed his fugue subjects in service of an ineffable beauty, as expressions of the deity, would be hard to argue with. The effect on St Theresa of God's arrow is undeniably erotic, and Bach's darker and more intense suspensions—when the tone in one chord bleeds into the next as a consequence of the counterpoint, producing a temporary dissonance—have an analogous effect.

Self-portrait in Masquerade has its own chapter in *Frivolitások és hitvallások* (Frivolous Confessions, 1988), the edited version of a long series of conversations that Szentkuthy had about his life. It was music historian László Eősze—chief editor of Zeneműkiadó, then the sole music publisher in Hungary—who commissioned *Doktor Haydn.* From *Confessions* we learn that huge arguments raged at the time about whether it should be published at all. Another chief editor also cast aspersions on the work's merits. The editors of the Goethe novel were not much kinder, which prompted Szentkuthy to write a long preface to his novel on Dürer in which he defines the genre:

> A literary biography written in the early twentieth century could no longer afford to be a "fictionalised biography" or *biographie romancée* of the type that became fashionable in the 1930s [...] neither could it be what used to be called a "faithful" reconstruction of a past age, meaning a scholarly and pedantic resurrection of contemporary genres of a period. Nor can one fall into the opposite extreme, or in other words one must not—in a frenzy to modernise and make it relevant—turn to so-called hyper-modern artistic procedures and tricks [...] such a novel must loftily select from the aesthetic and dramatic elements of the age in question, touching with playful sureness and putting a finger on exactly the blood vessels and nerve fibres that bind it to a twentieth-century position. ❧

The bombardment of Vienna at night, before the French troops occupied the city on 11th March, 1809. Engraving by Benedikt Pringer after Johann Nepomuk Stöckle. Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna. From László Somfai (ed.): Joseph Haydn. His Life in Pictures. *London: Faber & Faber, 1969.*

Miklós Szentkuthy

Doctor Haydn

Extract from the novel

The requiem-envisioning soul of 'Papa' Josephus Haydn, doctoris Oxoniensis, was not borne by the angel wings of St Peregrine, in gallant gesture, to Paris, but the Parisians were brought to Vienna in November 1805. The kettledrum rolls that had been no more than musical phantoms in his C major Mass in Times of War, the 'Paukenmesse', now sounded for real in Vienna's misty, muddy, rain-soaked streets.

Haydn had his chair pulled a little closer to the window, still elegant even at a time like this, somewhat nervously smoothing his periwig, his breastpin and his lace cuffs, cursing the cook and the manservant for being so cowardly not to dare step near the window when he called out for more wine (and he was calling out for it at a slightly brisker tempo than normal), but crouched over, hands trembling, as they brought him the glass on a tray polished to a dazzling brightness. This they considered recklessly tempting fate. 'Papa' was sitting there in full formal rig—"like a fully decked-out whore, don't you think?" the maestro demanded of his white-faced servants. Yes, there he sat, next to the undrawn curtains and wide-open window shutters, like some kind of white doll who has lost his wits, calling down God's judgement upon his head with suicidal insouciance. But 'Papa' wanted to see at close quarters what the French

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Miklós Szentkuthy (1908–1988)

wrote complex experimental fiction that explored the absurdity of life and the impossibility of imposing order on a chaotic world. The oeuvre mobilises a vast repository of knowledge of history, philosophy and the arts. Most important are the avant-garde Prae *(1934) and the volumes of* Szent Orpheus breviáriuma *(The Breviary of St. Orpheus), a philosophical examination of human experience he started publishing in 1935. Suppressed by ideological control, he wrote fictional biographies (1959–66) and translated many classics of English literature, most notably James Joyce's* Ulysses. *After the 1970s, he resumed work on* Szent Orpheus breviáriuma, *which he completed in 1984. An excerpt from a monumental series of interviews,* Frivolitások és hitvallások *(Frivolous Confessions) was published in* HQ *179. Szentkuthy's giant diary is awaiting publication.*

revolutionary perdition that had so unsettled his life over the past twenty years or so looked like. Compared with this French triumph in the autumn of 1805, every bat squeak that had issued from Paris hitherto had been child's play.

'Papa' conducted a quick inspection, tapping along on two sticks from one corner of the room to the other: music scores—in order; catalogue of works—ready and to hand; fortepiano—fine (he struck two notes, though it was more in the form of a resigned pat on the face of an old servant, his ring clicking as it hit the keyboard, his hands being greatly emaciated by now); he counted his silver, his clothes had been given a good shaking and brush; the valet assured him with a half-witted gesture (fright having robbed him of speech) that he had also swept and waxed the floor under the carpet. 'Papa' then resumed his seat in the window and looked at the strangely shaped cannons. He was familiar only with the cannons used in Nelson's navy, Nelson himself having made drawings of them for him; they were over there, in the top drawer of the writing desk with the silver knobs: unquestionably extremely useful and bracing documents to have on the day Bonaparte was marching in—at which thought 'Papa' permitted himself a smile. He immediately proceeded to swear, because the manservant had set the glass of wine down a long way from the armchair, and the cushion that had been fastened to it by twine had naturally slipped to one side, *wie immer bei solchen apokalyptischen Gelegenheiten*—as always on apocalyptic occasions like this—servants were such yellow-bellied wretches!

Haydn nodded off beside the window. The cook and the manservant promptly seized the chance to scramble on hands and knees, keeping their heads down even when this close to the ground, and pull Signor Giuseppe further back into the room, but they had barely finished this stealthy manoeuvre and were about to straighten up when suddenly they were sent quite literally sprawling because a splendid French carriage came to a halt right in front of the window. There were bawling red-jacketed soldiers on the horses, on the box and at the rear, clearly throwing Latin vehemence into a heated argument over whether this was the right place to stop or not. 'Papa' himself was awoken from his dreams by the commotion made by horses and men, and, by the time he had more or less come to, he could only see even more dreamlike things in the room —as if he had merely snoozed on a bit more.

Two French gentlemen were standing before him, one shorter and podgier in ceremonial dress, his decorations tinkling like sacring bells, the other taller and gaunter, a slim briefcase under his arm, in which no more than one or two documents could be lurking, but those such as would decide Vienna's fate for centuries to come. It was this briefcase that 'Papa' noticed first on awakening: he's no doubt some fat cat, because scribes from the revenue office scurry about with much fatter bundles of paper than that.

On politely introducing themselves, it turned out that the cantankerous, damnably spry soldier was one of Bonaparte's marshals, Monsieur Soult by

name, the other, who inspected the piano with arms folded and nodded at him, with a diplomatic "Enfin! We've tracked this one down too!" expression written all over his face—that was Monsieur Maret, secretary of state, senator, and the Tacitus who drafted Bonaparte's bulletins.

The cook and the manservant were wailing and moaning so noisily in the doorway that the gentlemen could not possibly let it pass without comment, besides which the tragicomic scene provided an excellent excuse for starting a conversation. The secretary of state commented that the domestic servants' laments were fully justified since, no two ways about it, Marshal Soult, by a bold attack from the rear, had succeeded in capturing Vienna's prize strategic point, the *"padre della musica's"* study! Naturally, he, Senator Maret only wished to write down this imperial bulletin on the basis of personal on-the-spot observation. In so doing, they were also expressing their extraordinary pleasure: l'Empereur had entrusted them to pass on his own imperial greetings, and wished his dear Haydn good health and continued creative fervour, and on this, the first day of his entry into the city, he wished to assure the Padre that he would consider guaranteeing the peace requisite for that work an agreeable duty of the first rank.

While Secretary Maret was communicating this to 'Papa', who, as if in response to a magic word, had raised himself from his seat without the aid of sticks, ruddy-faced Marshal Soult (not so long ago he was as yet no more than a faceless peasant lad), puffing like Vulcanus, thrust two plump purses into the hands of the gormlessly gawping domestics and, clanking the tip of his scabbard between their ankles, drove them with a roar of laughter out of the room.

'Papa' wept like a child from emotion (there had been plenty to blub about in recent months), but retained a genteel and haughty bearing, as if all his years of training at Eszterháza were only now coming to a first and last true flowering. He conversed amiably in good old Weenie style, at times treating the Imperial Marshal and Foreign Secretary of State as if they were grandsons paying him a visit on his name day, almost letting fall a *"These tiny-tots are just too much!"* Maybe he even said it, because I was quite sure that, in the course of a liberal quaffing of wine and toasting he repeatedly remarked that for twenty years this was *not* how he had imagined the first wave of the Paris revolution sweeping the threshold of his home, not this way, not at all this way. It was hard to credit that this was stone-cold sober reality.

When Senator Maret (his lips, cheeks, scrawny hands and simple clothes as ethereally thin as his briefcase—"Good Lord! He's wasting away! Whereas I just put on weight each time we occupy a fair-sized village like this *charmante Vienne*!", Marshal Soult averred and was knocking back the wine as if he were gulping down whole apples), so anyway when Senator Maret related that he had heard *la Création du Monde* in Paris, 'Papa', in best schoolboy manner and with charming punctiliousness, played the grand seigneur by bragging that Vienna was also girding up right now for a monumental performance of *The Creation,*

but let them just get on with it, he himself was now so frail that there was little chance of his getting to hear too many more reprises.

In fact... 'Papa' let them into a little secret... The three men pulled up their chairs close to each other, clutching their glasses to their knees, with 'Papa's' wine trembling in the glittering crystal goblet. To be sure that the noble liquid would end up in a safer spot, Marshal Soult obliged Signor Giuseppe to swallow the lot.

'Papa' recounted that it had been his custom of late, if someone told him that such-and-such was going to happen in three weeks' time, or two months from today, then he was able to visualise it happening, right before his eyes, exactly as if it had already happened, lest as a result of a blunder on the part of the *capriccio della morte* he were forced beforehand to... After all, I'm not a newborn babe, *vous comprenez*... Anyway, so he should not miss such-and-such, whatever happened...

And not just visualise it: often he asked to be taken to the very places about which they were speaking. Of course, only in the greatest possibly incognito (at this he sniggered as if it were some childish prank). Off and away, to be sure! To where such-and-such things are planned. So, for instance, he had himself carried off to the university assembly hall where Salieri was going to conduct *The Creation*! It was late in the evening, and he was completely alone in his sedan chair in the middle of the enormous hall, and he had heard the whole concert in advance, seen the glittering audience, heard the applause, seen Princess Esterházy, up on the balcony on the left, in her pink silk dress with the magnolia-leaf pattern. Also there was the Archbishop of Vienna, who on this occasion had discovered no secret masonic pestilence in the text, or in the music of the angels, because the moment the Biblical opera —or was it, perhaps, just an operetta?— reached one of the more ticklish sections, Baroness Spielmann had leaned over on his right to entertain him with a tidbit of Vatican tittle-tattle, virtually tipping her décolletage onto his episcopal knees, whereas the pianist Mademoiselle Kurzböck from his left had murmured all kinds of Pietist legends into the prelate's ear about the pious prayers that I was saying, day and night, in repentance of my sins ("Prosit!" interjected the good-humoured Marshal Soult).

"Yes, I have already seen it all, all of it, sitting on my very own in the darkened assembly hall of the university... *a pisserl Phantasie hab'i doch immer g'habt**, and even now I can laugh that there are things that have already been set down in black and white in my memory but the Viennese are still waiting for it in the future. That's a smart way of outwitting people, don't you think?"

Marshal Soult, not being exactly a shrinking violet, nor the most sensitive of souls, was quite incapable of supposing this about anybody else (let's face it, he was not exactly a soul of plain ordinary tact either), latched on to 'Papa's' idea of using a story about the future—and thus craftily cheating death—by relating things in the past perfect, and so, slapping shoulders, he explained how lucky 'Papa' was that Bonaparte was now installed in Schönbrunn Palace

* ■ I've always had an imaginative touch

instead of Kaiser Franz! How much more magnificent was the funeral that he "had put on" for 'Papa'; how much more sumptuous the catafalque that he set up; how much more ostentatious the honour guard that had saluted around the bier; how much more musical the requiem mass that had been sung. And while the irrepressible Soult, in a simulation of sobbing, embraced the maestro, the maestro himself laughed heartily at the heavy humour of the joke —a soldierly riposte to 'Papa's' train of thought. Prosit! Cheers!

Showing plainly by his expression that he did not much approve of the marshal's crude "riposte", Secretary of State Maret, with the aim of diverting the company into a more proper channel, asked the maestro whether it would be placing too great a strain on his powers for him to play them something.

'Papa' rose to his feet, again without the assistance of sticks, quaffed from the glass that Soult, with a jingle of his spurs, offered him and sat down at the fortepiano, a crafty smirk on his face. He played the *Gott erhalte,* the Austrian Emperor's Hymn.

Senator Maret pulled a face as if wincing in pain (though no sound passed his lips), whereas Marshal Soult roared with laughter and even began to sing along with 'Papa', meanwhile muttering towards Maret in a barely comprehensible voice: "Stuff this in your bulletin!"

Haydn, the way one often finds with the old and the sick, suddenly, from one moment to the next, became deadly worn-out, his white face turning even whiter, as if he were on the verge of passing out. Maret and Soult reached for his arms from both sides, but with a gentleness that signalled it was nothing but politeness on their part, by no means a matter of tending to a sick man. They accompanied him back to his armchair, where Haydn quickly recovered. Marshal Soult, guided by some rural instinct, spoke more softly, upon which the senator became livelier in order to avoid falling into a hospital whisper. They entertained the padre with a few more military anecdotes, and when they bade farewell, against all etiquette and sincere protestations, Haydn escorted them to the gate.

He stood at the gate for a long time, watching the carriage as it hurtled off, but the street just would not settle down and it was impossible to see across to the other side for the crowds of dragoons, hussars and gunners. The cook and the manservant were standing towards the back of the cool gateway, holding a warm coat and well-lined headgear at the ready to proffer the instant that the master should set off back inside. Haydn spurned them. Politely, of course, more politely as if they had been marshals and senators.

Before opening the door to his bedroom, he listened for a long time beside it. Inside the parrot was delivering a monologue: *"Guten Abend, Herr Haydn! Guten Abend, Herr Haydn! Guten A—*!" It suddenly broke off its discourse, no doubt because a fly had buzzed into the cage, and could any historical event in the world be more important than that!—*Nicht wahr? nicht wahr? nicht wahr?* ❧

Translated by Tim Wilkinson

János Malina

On Home Ground

Dénes Bartha and Haydn Research in Hungary

In 1761, Joseph Haydn, a young composer already highly regarded in Vienna, was appointed deputy kappelmeister by Prince Paul Anton Esterházy, the highly educated and music-loving head of that wealthy, pro-Habsburg Hungarian aristocratic family. Haydn remained in the Prince's employ until his death on 31 May 1809, even though in the last decade and a half his employment had become increasingly formal. The surviving papers concerning more than three decades in the service of the Esterházys as well as countless documents pertaining to his activities, first in Kismarton (Eisenstadt) and then in Eszterháza, are now housed at the National Széchényi Library in Budapest. Of course, there are numerous documents, letters and scores in other European libraries and archives too, yet there is no doubt that Budapest is the international centre for sources concerning Haydn's works. Some items from this treasure trove had been published already between the two world wars by Esterházy archivist János Hárich, yet the true extent of its richness did not become apparent until 1957. That year, in preparation for the upcoming 150th anniversary of Haydn's death in 1959, and facilitated by the thaw that followed repression after the 1956 revolution, archivist Arisztid Valkó published some Haydn documents. Hárich, who had been imprisoned along with Pál Esterházy (no longer Prince after 1945), continued the work with unflagging energy in Austria after leaving the country in 1956 until the 1970s.

The anniversary year of 1959 saw, in addition to significant musical events in Budapest and Fertőd (Eszterháza), the unveiling of the composer's bust in Budapest. An international musicological conference took place whose proceedings were published in a separate volume. Haydn's works preserved at

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the National Széchényi Library formed the subject of an anthology, and the dean of Hungarian musicology, Bence Szabolcsi, wrote a seminal study on the Hungarian influences (mostly dance-music influences) in Haydn's music. In his excellent book *The Magnificence of Eszterháza,* published in English translation in 1962, Mátyás Horányi (an "outsider," since he was neither a musicologist nor an archivist) gave an account of operatic life at Eszterháza and Eisenstadt. Intended for the general public, this work is seminal even today by virtue of the extensive documentary material it contains. Yet the most important scholarly feat was that of Dénes Bartha, next to Szabolcsi the foremost musicologist of the era, in collaboration with his recently graduated, promising pupil László Somfai. Their book *Haydn als Opernkapellmeister* (Haydn the Opera Conductor), published in 1960 but still related to the previous year's anniversary, drew on the entire collection of scores and documents found at the National Széchényi Library to provide exhaustive, almost day-by-day, coverage of its subject. (In the article "The Unknown Haydn", re-published here fifty years after its original appearance in the inaugural issue of this journal, on pp. 90–97, Bartha sums up the findings of their forthcoming book.) The same 1959 anniversary prompted a further book, published in 1961 (with reprints in 1978 and 2008): *The Life of Joseph Haydn in Letters and Documents,* offering an authentic biography of Haydn for the general public, co-edited by Bartha and another young musicologist, Dorrit Révész (who happened to be László Somfai's wife and who passed away in 2008).

The centennial of Dénes Bartha's birth, which was commemorated by the Hungarian Society of Musicology and Music Criticism, fell shortly before the Haydn anniversary of 2009. Therefore it is doubly appropriate to sketch the portrait of this internationally renowned Hungarian Haydn scholar.

Dénes Bartha was born in Budapest on 2 October 1908. He studied musicology and classics in Berlin from 1926 to 1930. After his return to Hungary, he worked in the library of the National Museum, the predecessor of today's National Széchényi Library. A few years later, he started teaching both at the University of Budapest and the Franz Liszt Academy of Music. Teaching became one of the great passions of his life. As a musicologist, he was interested in a wide range of topics—sometimes prompted by practical circumstances: projects arose from work assignments, teaching duties or simply represented problems to be solved. He chose a Renaissance subject for his dissertation. Then, in the course of the next fifteen years until the end of the war, he described an ancient instrument from the Avar period, researched various issues in early Hungarian music history, discussed folk-music recordings, the history of melody, the theory of comparative musicology, Franz Liszt, Beethoven and Mozart. He wrote textbooks on Hungarian and general music history and reviewed concerts for *Pester Lloyd,* the German-language

daily published in Budapest. His energy and erudition were exceptional, his understanding of every question he tackled profound. His command of literature and languages, including Classical ones, was legendary. These encyclopaedic interests sprang from an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and from a desire to make himself useful in every possible way. He was fiery and enthusiastic, but at the same time kind and modest. At the commemorative conference, his former students recalled that he was always in a hurry: in class, he always turned the pages of a score several measures too early. He was already thinking of the musical events of the next page—and perhaps of the next challenge as well.

It was characteristic of him that shortly after the war, when the whole country and its educational system had barely begun to normalise, he was already pushing for an anthology of music history. The first volume of this ambitious project (ending with Bach's death) was published in 1948, edited and commented by Bartha. Even more important was the invitation he received to organise the Department of Musicology at the Liszt Academy, of which he became the founder and, along with Szabolcsi, its professor. He also continued his activities as a journal editor, co-edited an important and voluminous collection of Hungarian melodies from the early 19th century and wrote a splendid popular biography of Bach and a monograph on Beethoven's symphonies—both published in 1956. It was after the revolution of that year (when he served on the Revolutionary Committees of the Academy and the Association of Musicians) that Haydn entered his life as a scholarly project, to which he remained faithful for the following decade.

After a few research trips to Western Europe—which could by no means be taken for granted in those days—Bartha received his first invitation to the United States in 1961. Three years later he began his American university career which, punctuated by a few shorter or longer periods at home, lasted until 1981. During these years, he taught at five different universities, his longest tenure being at the University of Pittsburgh (1969–79). He used his position, among other things, to bring the results of Hungarian Bartók scholarship to the world. During this period he published little: in addition to Haydn subjects, he wrote repeatedly about the appearance of the quatrain form which is also present in Hungarian folk songs in the works of the Viennese classics. In 1970 he revised his book on the Beethoven symphonies. In 1974 he taught in Hungary for the last time: he lectured on Schubert's songs with the old fire and the old ambition to do everything. He returned home for good in 1981, with impaired vision and hearing. He died on 7 September 1993.

Up to the Haydn anniversary year of 1959, Hungarian Haydn scholarship was dominated, as we have seen, by source studies. In the half-century that has elapsed since, the emphasis has shifted to the study of the musical material itself. For the first half of this period, Bartha and Somfai, the two

authors of the great opera monograph, remained the principal Haydn specialists in the country. Between 1961 and 1972, Bartha collaborated with Jenő Vécsey and also with Mária Eckhardt on editions of three of Haydn's opera scores. He was also responsible for a scholarly edition of Haydn's collected letters (1965), based on research by H. C. Robbins Landon. Finally, he published five articles, some of them substantial, analysing the scores of works of the Eszterháza period, discussing the musical characters found in Haydn's works, and setting goals for further Haydn research in Hungary.

After 1959, László Somfai published numerous important analytical studies on various segments of Haydn's oeuvre. A dedicated and passionate teacher in his own right, he has lectured on Haydn in the Academy's musicology department since 1969. His main focus has been the string quartet—the crystallisation of the genre in Haydn's hands, the special characteristics of the quartet sound, Haydn's typical modulatory procedures, the internal structuring of the individual opus numbers, the late quartet style, and the secrets of the compositional process as revealed by sketches and autographs. Additional publications have addressed the new balance of the classical movement sequence, as opposed to Baroque practices; Haydn's stylistic renewal in London and his tribute to Gregor Werner, his predecessor in Eisenstadt. No less productive than his teacher, Somfai published *Joseph Haydn: His Life in Contemporary Pictures* (first, in 1969, in English, later in Hungarian as well). Thanks to its magnificent illustrations, this popular volume is an invaluable resource to this day.

Somfai's magnum opus, published in Hungarian in 1979 and in English in 1995, is his book *The Keyboard Sonatas of Joseph Haydn: Instruments and Performance Practice.* His complex approach, which also characterises his work on Bartók, is amply manifest in this volume. Somfai goes beyond the written music; he consistently confronts his iron-clad analyses with performance practice and what cannot be entirely captured in the score. This book became a classic the minute it was published, and confirmed the place of Haydn's sonatas among the most exciting keyboard oeuvres in musical literature.

Somfai was appointed Head of the Budapest Bartók Archives in 1972. Aside from his teaching, he turned more and more to studying Bartók. In the mid-80s, a younger Bartha student, Katalin Komlós, took over as a Haydn specialist, with a seminal study on texture and form in Haydn's piano trios. Komlós, who also excels as a fortepiano player (like Somfai, she enjoys close contacts with Malcolm Bilson's fortepiano "stable" at Cornell University), examined the wider context of Haydn's keyboard music in her monograph *Fortepianos and their Music: Germany, Austria, England, 1760–1800,* published by Oxford University Press in 1995. She has further published several exciting articles on Haydn's songs, and wrote the chapter on smaller vocal works in the *Cambridge Companion to Haydn* (2005).

In the meantime, the study of archival documents has also picked up new momentum. Recent work by Péter Halász and Zoltán Farkas at the Institute of Musicology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest has continued to explore the Esterházy estate and the diocesan music library in nearby Győr, drawing a picture of Haydn's immediate musical environment and shedding light on international contacts that influenced this repertory, reaching as far as Naples. Katalin Szacsvay has subjected the music library of Eisenstadt cathedral to in-depth research, showing the local milieu surrounding Haydn's Masses and other sacred works.

Front view of the opera at Eszterháza. Detail of an engraving from the "Description of the Prince's Palace of Eszterháza in the Kingdom of Hungary". Pressburg, 1784, Hungarian National Museum, Budapest.

One major task still remains to be carried out: In 1807, Haydn committed himself to leaving his books, printed music, manuscripts and coins to the Princes Esterházy. A monographic study of the Haydn Collection of these 527 items held at the National Széchényi Library would require considerable energy but would be extremely rewarding. This could happen soon. Somfai's student Balázs Mikusi (who has also studied at Cornell), the author of several remarkable recent studies on Haydn's vocal music, has just become Head of Music at the National Széchényi Library. He has already started working on the Haydn Collection. It could well be that, fifty years after the huge advances made in Hungarian Haydn research in 1960, the National Library will once again provide the raw material for significant scholarly output.

At Cornell, Mikusi studied with James Webster, a highly respected Haydn scholar who, together with Somfai and Armin Raab, Director of the Haydn Institute of Cologne, has compiled the programme for the international Haydn conference to be held in Budapest and Fertőd (Eszterháza) between 27 and 30 May, 2009. Their names guarantee that this conference will be the most important of the half-dozen events being planned around the world in celebration of Haydn. It should be amply clear why Hungary is the natural venue for a gathering of this calibre. ❧

Dénes Bartha

The Unknown Haydn

Haydn as an Opera Conductor at Eszterháza

Ever since the industrious C. F. Pohl published the first two volumes of his splendid Haydn biography around 1880, later Haydn biographies have consisted largely of no more than adaptations of the data elaborated in Pohl's classical work. Research since then has produced few essential new additions to our knowledge of Haydn's life and activities.

In the study of Haydn's various compositions as source material, fundamental research by Professor Jens Peter Larsen of Copenhagen yielded such rich results that since their publication (1939–1941) there apparently remained little for posterity to undertake. According to musicologists, Pohl and Larsen both pored over the material of the former Esterházy archives—so rich in Haydn works—very thoroughly, and thus it appeared that the era of

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Dénes Bartha (1908–1993)

founded the Department of Musicology at the Franz Liszt Academy of Music in 1947 and served as its professor to his death. He edited the music journals Magyar zenei szemle *(1941–44),* Zenei szemle *(with Bence Szabolcsi, 1947–49),* Studia musicologica *(1961–93) and was co-editor of* Zenetudományi tanulmányok *(1953–61). He was a visiting professor at Smith College (1964), Harvard University (1964–65), Cornell University (1965–66), the University of Pittsburgh (1966–67), where he subsequently was the Andrew W. Mellon Professor (1969–79), and the University of Washington, in Seattle (1980–81). In 1963 he received the Dent Medal of England, and in 1982 the Ehrenkreuz für Kunst und Wissenschaft of Austria. He was the author of books on Bach, Mozart and Beethoven but became internationally known as a Haydn scholar. He was on the editorial board of the Haydn collected edition, edited Haydn's letters (*Gesammelte Briefe und Aufzeichnungen, *with H. C. Robbins Landon, 1965) and a volume of Haydn documents with Dorrit Révész (1978, new edition 2008). His book on Haydn's operatic activities at Eszterháza,* Haydn als Opernkapellmeister *(with László Somfai) was published in 1960 in Budapest.*

The article printed above first appeared fifty years ago, in the inaugural issue of what was then The New Hungarian Quarterly.

extensive Haydn research had come to an end. After the end of the Second World War, the Széchényi National Library in Budapest took possession of the material of the former Esterházy archives. Hungarian scholars, therefore, felt that it was their responsibility to sift through this valuable material once more, and make its treasures available to everybody.

From the standpoint of music history the part of the Esterházy archives which mainly interests us comprises three large categories:

1 ■ The material of the "Haydn Collection" strictly speaking, the richest in autographs in the world, which found its way into the Prince's archives mostly as Haydn's personal papers. (Pohl and Larsen had thoroughly studied this material at the time so that we could hardly expect any surprises there).

2 ■ The documentary collection of the Esterházy archives, a treasure trove of interesting data on the musical life of the Esterházy household in the form of letters, official papers, invoices and so forth. (Pohl once diligently delved into this material too, but, as has been recently established, he far from exhausted its possibilities, particularly with regard to the operatic life of the Eszterháza theatre in the light of fresh data unearthed here.)

3 ■ The musical material of the Esterházy operatic collection, which—in addition to less important earlier and later operas—includes first of all the scores and parts used in the performance of Italian operas produced at Eszterháza under Haydn's direction between 1775 and 1790.

Although the 1779 fire which destroyed the Eszterháza theatre also inflicted a certain amount of damage on the operatic material, documents on the repertoire, prepared, rehearsed and conducted by Haydn over a period of more than 15 years there, have remained largely intact. When we began to examine these scores more closely, we were amazed to discover that Haydn scholars had, thus far, apparently not even looked over this very significant material. Otherwise it would have been impossible for them to miss the startling fact that it abounds in evidence of Haydn's creative work and of his personal interpretations as a conductor; abridgements, additions, improvements, re-orchestrations, and finally complete inserted arias and whole new scenes mark the exceptional intensity of Haydn's conducting work.

Since the spring of 1958 my talented former pupil, the librarian of the music collection, László Somfai and myself have spent over eighteen months in a thorough study and systematic elaboration of these papers, which have not yet been seen by any modern scholar. Our first task was the chronological arrangement of the opera performances. What we knew about this up to now was based almost exclusively on the evidence of libretti specially printed for the Eszterháza performances at the time. Pohl enumerated altogether 36 such libretti, but he did not mention either the chronology of the Eszterháza performances, or other details. Haydn scholars, following in Pohl's footsteps, more or less accepted this rather meagre result, although from the copies of

libretti which occasionally came to light it could have been concluded that the number of operas performed at Eszterháza under Haydn's direction was in fact much larger than the number listed by Pohl.

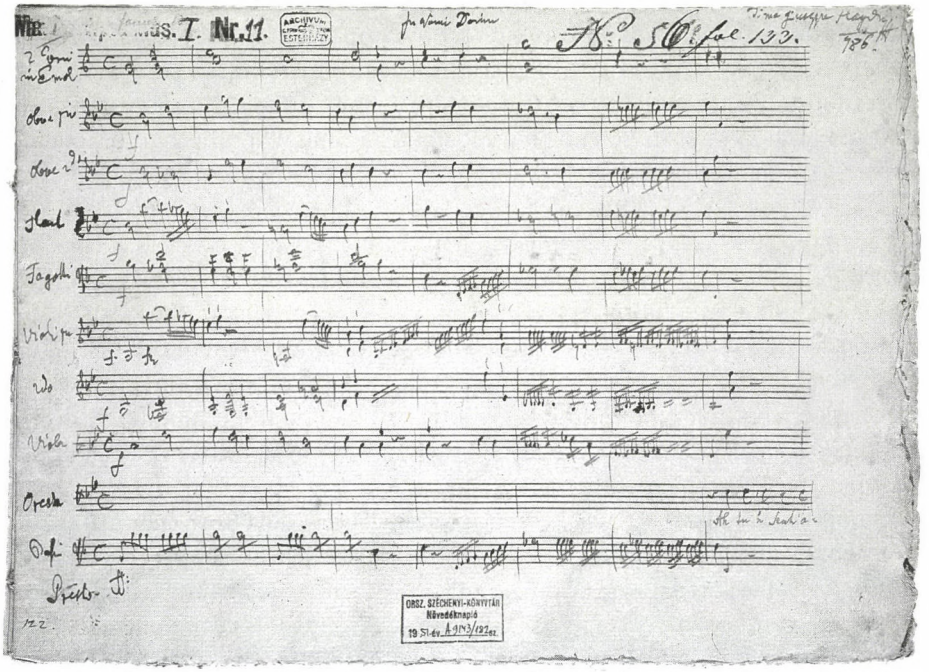
When the former archivist of the Eszterháza collection, János Hárich, prepared the catalogue of the libretto collection around 1940, he was able to list the titles of no less than 51 relevant libretti. The libretto collection itself perished during the siege of Budapest at the end of the Second World War, but the catalogue has survived and is today the source of a wealth of information.

We gradually came to the realization that in Eszterháza, under the direction of Haydn, there existed one of the most important Italian-language opera theatres in contemporary Central Europe rivalling with the diversity and richness of its programme the Imperial Court Theatre in Vienna, and at times even surpassing it.

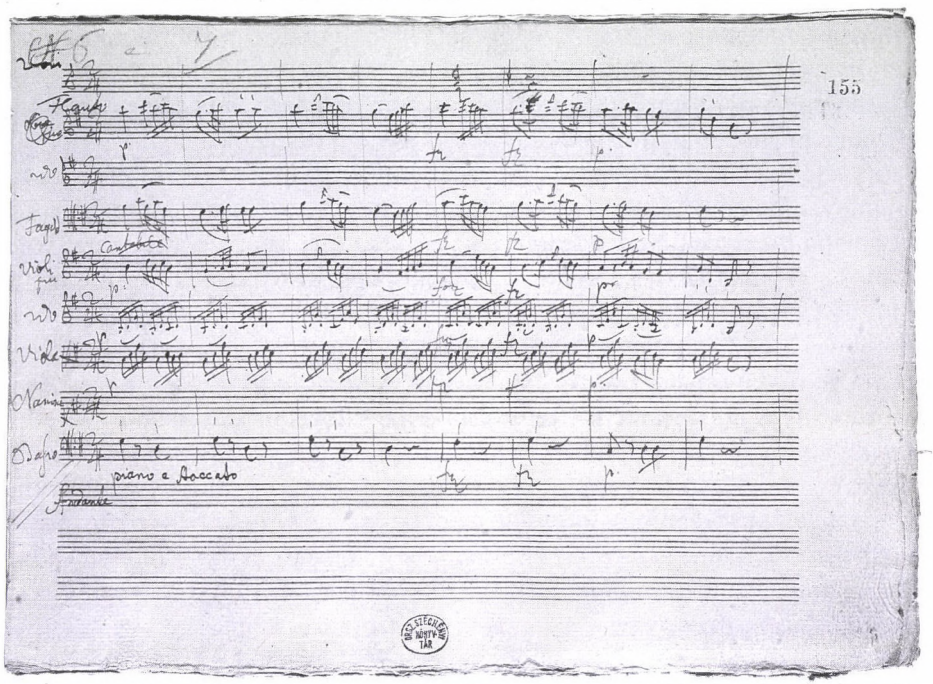
Our task was first to compile the complete material (copyists' invoices, libretto printing invoices, costume budgets, plans of sets, purchases of operas, and so on), pertaining to the history of performances, compare it with the material of the Esterházy libretti, known today mainly as a list of titles, and finally to compare the chronological material thus gained with the evidence of the material which has survived in the music library. We finally succeeded in acquiring the necessary historical data for all the surviving musical material, that is, in determining the exact dates of first performances and revivals. As the result of our year and a half of work we succeeded in obtaining a fairly complete picture of the opera workshop under Haydn's direction. The fruit of our labours is the extensive monograph *Haydn als Opernkappelmeister,* the publication of which is scheduled for 1960, in the aftermath of the Haydn bicentenary.

Here are a few figures: during the 15 years we examined, Haydn, without obtaining any assistance worth mentioning from any musician, prepared, rehearsed and conducted no less than 88 premières, 6 revivals and countless repertoire productions. This does not include some 10 operas, the scores of which he carefully studied and prepared for performances which never took place. We found that at Eszterháza first two and later three operas were performed each week. On the days in between, various theatre companies performed. There was one year (1786) when, in a single season, Haydn had to conduct no less than 125 opera performances. The number of premières was as follows: in three years (1779, 1782, 1786) there were eight premières each; in four years (1783, 1784, 1788, 1789) there were seven each; in the remaining years their number varied between four and six each.

It is little short of miraculous how Haydn could muster the energy, bearing in mind his unflagging work as a composer, to accomplish this tremendous task. A practically unknown Haydn is revealed to us in this material which, until now, was not deemed worthy of anyone's attention. That Haydn scholars had really never seen it is shown by the fact that not one of them mentioned



"Quando la rosa", inserted aria composed by Haydn for Anfossi's opera La Matilda ritrovata *(Eszterháza, 1779). Autograph score, hitherto unknown.*



"Ah tu non senti amico", inserted aria composed by Haydn for Traetta's opera Iphigenia in Tauris *(1786). Autograph score, signed by Haydn: "In Nomine Domini di me Giuseppe Haydn 786."*

the countless musical alterations which Haydn made in the scores of the early Italian composers (Cimarosa, Piccini, Anfossi, Paisiello, Salieri, Sarti). He unhesitatingly abridged, re-orchestrated, re-fashioned and composed his own inserted arias and scenes, and that mostly at a time when he had practically ceased to compose operas of his own.

Haydn research had long established that the composer occasionally enriched the Italian operas mounted at Eszterháza with his own inserted arias, recording about a dozen and a half precisely defined inserted arias. On the basis of the material we have studied, this figure will rise considerably. On the one hand, inserted arias, composed by Haydn, have come to light of which scholars had no knowledge whatever, and on the other, an examination of the operatic material has made it possible to determine the original purpose and date of origin of all such pieces. Thus the great thematic listing of Haydn's works which is now under preparation in Switzerland will be able to profit a great deal from our results too.

It was found from a comparison of the music material and the original casting that the largest and most significant portion of Haydn's own inserted arias were composed expressly for Luigia Polzelli, Haydn's companion in those years. She was a woman of mediocre musical ability, with a relatively small tonal range. Still Haydn made almost superhuman efforts, by adjusting her part to suit her register, or by adding an especially varied and rich orchestration, to bring her into sharp relief among the singers and draw the attention of Prince Esterházy to her.

An especially interesting episode of our research was the problem of Haydn's proposed performance in 1790 of Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro.* The score and the vocal parts were purchased in Vienna in July 1789 (on July 14—an interesting coincidence!) for the Prince's theatre, obviously for the purpose of having it performed at Eszterháza. In 1790, the instrumental parts were copied and plans for the décor and costumes were also made. In the fragments of musical material that have survived, we find indications regarding the casting planned by Haydn. But a death in the Prince's family dashed all these plans, so that ultimately (as revealed by our data) not a single operatic work of Mozart's was performed at Eszterháza. This allows us to question whether Haydn's esteem for Mozart's music was really as great as the biographers of the two are wont to believe. In this respect it is noteworthy, for example, that when Haydn, in preparing Anfossi's opera *Le gelosie fortunate* for performance in Eszterháza, came across an inserted aria by Mozart in the score which had been purchased in Vienna (K. 541), he did not hesitate and in his passion for abridgement ruthlessly wiped Mozart's aria from the score.

It has become evident, therefore, that in Eszterháza Haydn did not simply rehearse and perform the opera repertoire of his contemporaries, but in a most far-reaching manner revised and re-arranged the scores obtained from many

sources to suit his own taste and needs. And we need not even wonder at this. Around 1780, when the opera workshop was in full swing, the Maestro, who had already reached the height of his musical stature, was not satisfied with the fashionable tunes and Mediterranean verbosity of loosely woven though often winning operas. In this period Haydn's musical diction was already oriented towards an elaborate symphonic structure, and he expected great concentration and conciseness in vocal operatic music too, which he was able to find only in exceptional instances among contemporary Italian composers (mostly in the music of the foremost of his contemporaries, Paisiello; characteristically enough, the number of Haydn's arbitrary interventions is the smallest here).

An interesting feature of Haydn's revisions is the fact that he consistently required quicker tempi than prescribed by his Italian contemporaries. To mention only an extreme example: in one of the Salieri operas, Haydn with his own hand altered the tempo of the original *Andante maestoso* to *Allegro vivace*, which was almost tantamount to refashioning the entire character of the piece.

At the same time, Haydn was often dissatisfied with the orchestration of the Italian operas, in which, as compared with the strings, used virtually throughout without pause, the woodwinds were assigned an almost completely subordinate role. Haydn by now had already behind him some 80 symphonies and was at work at his famous series of symphonic masterpieces commissioned in Paris. It is no wonder that he found the constant predominance of the strings in the old Italian operas anaemic and monotonous. Therefore, whenever he could, and had the time—and especially where a Polzelli role was involved—he spared no effort in colouring and enriching the scores of operas performed at Eszterháza with new woodwind parts he himself copied.

These and a profusion of similar new findings constitute the substance of our book on Haydn as an opera conductor due to appear soon.

Permit us to add a few sentences about the method with which we succeeded in elaborating this complex documentary material. The difficulties we had to cope with may best be conveyed by pointing out that, even in a single operatic score, we often found as many as three different historical layers. The scores used as the basis for performances at the Eszterháza theatre were most often obtained abroad, from Venice or Vienna, less frequently from Dresden. Often in the purchased material two variants of handwriting and musical material had already been added. Further changes were made by Haydn at Eszterháza: deletions, corrections, additions and insertions, done partly in his own hand, and partly in the hand of the professional copyists employed at Eszterháza. In a single opera it is not rare to find a mixture of five or six copyists' handwriting in the most colourful disarray.

In order to find our way in this jungle of musical writing we again had to raise the question of the so-called authentic copyists with great emphasis. Professor

Larsen's research had wrestled with this problem about 20–25 years ago, and we now feel that we have succeeded in taking a tremendous stride towards a solution of this problem. It should be known that only a relatively small part of Haydn's production as a composer, especially the works of his younger years, has survived as autographs or in a printed score corrected by Haydn. We know hundreds of his works exclusively from copies, made by his contemporaries. The authenticity of the copies, however, is greatly reduced by the unbelievable imprecision that prevailed in those days even in naming the composer. As Haydn's name was already considered a good trademark, unscrupulous copyists wrote his name on compositions which had nothing to do with him. This is the origin of the profusion of pseudo-Haydn works in archives and catalogues.

How can research succeed in surmounting this Babel of confusion? Only by being able to weigh most precisely the reliability and authenticity of the available copied sources. It is evident that a copyist who worked at Eszterháza under the eye of the master deserves incomparably more credence than someone who many hundreds of kilometres away irresponsibly wrote Haydn's name onto some musical work. Professor Larsen's research already sharply differentiated between these two main categories and he only accepted the first group, the so-called "authentic copyists," as genuine. Professor Larsen's work acquaints us with the handwriting of five or six authentic copyists.

The difficulty arises from the fact that only a small fraction of the copies attributed to Haydn and scattered about the world were turned out by the five or six musicians belonging directly to Haydn's circle. Until today, we had no reliable criteria at our disposal to evaluate the remaining hundreds of copies, although there is no doubt that in that feverish musical activity at Eszterháza far more persons worked under Haydn than these few musicians. Their identity could not be established until now, because research relied almost exclusively on the copy material of symphonic music, and there copyists used their initials only on the rarest of occasions, at the beginning or end of the copy.

The operatic material we have examined decisively changes all this. In the person of Johann (János) Schellinger we make the acquaintance of one of Haydn's most important copyists, whom Haydn esteemed so highly that he made use of his services in writing his first catalogue, his largely autograph *Entwurfkatalog.* In addition we dug up the names of a whole staff of copyists employed at Eszterháza, whom we could largely identify on the basis of the copyists' invoices in the archives. With this the number of copyists considered as authentic from Haydn's standpoint rises from five or six names to three times as many (about 18), and as a result, the material at our disposal apt to authenticate individual pieces increases considerably.

The question may arise: on the basis of what criteria do we regard this or that copyist working at Eszterháza as an authentic copyist? From the musical material and from its comparison with the old libretti, the original form at the

time of purchase is clearly discernible, as are the changes, improvements or additions, made at Eszterháza. If in the case of an inserted aria we could identify even a single copyist as working at Eszterháza, it followed that the rest of the copyists of that same insert piece must have also worked at Eszterháza, under Haydn's supervision.

In order to preclude the possibility of any error we accepted the copyists working at the same time on various parts of the same piece as authentic only if, in addition to identifying the work, we succeeded in determining what paper was used, on the basis of the watermarks. Then if but one of the previous copyists emerged again, in some other musical intervention of Eszterháza origin, we could once more localise several members of the group of copyists working with Haydn. It is self-evident that all those musicians who worked at Eszterháza under Haydn's supervision in the copying of operatic material are to be qualified as authentic copyists with respect to Haydn.

We have already mentioned the question of identifying paper, of examining watermarks. This is a border area whose research methods have, in recent years, begun to yield rich results, especially in the case of major composers with a huge and varied output, like Bach or Haydn. When the copyist's hand alone yields no success in localising, or in qualifying as authentic or non-authentic an autograph score, the quality and watermark of the paper used often helps. Professor Larsen's research to this end had already determined that there was a paper mill on the vast Esterházy estate, which distinguished its products from paper coming from some other source such as Vienna or Italy by means of a special watermark. When this special Esterházy watermark appears on a copy, it may be assumed, independently of the copyist's person, that it could not have been produced elsewhere than at one of the Esterházy residences, at Kismarton (Eisenstadt) or Eszterháza. On the basis of the material examined by us we succeeded in verifying as Esterházy paper, beyond any doubt, a whole series of new watermarks.

The reconstruction of operatic life at Eszterháza was no easy task; nevertheless, we feel that our efforts were not in vain. We succeeded in bringing closer the everyday life and the complete musical repertoire of one of the most significant, albeit short-lived, opera stages of the 18th century, while casting new light on a period in Haydn's creative life about which the earlier Haydn literature could produce either nothing, or only a few sketchily drawn lines.

In addition, we have now succeeded in showing that the 15 years Haydn devoted essentially to the Eszterháza operatic stage were spent in a previously unsuspected frenzy of work, constituting a chapter of virtually unparallelled richness in the musical taste of the Viennese Classical style. Examining this chapter also sheds light on Haydn's attitude towards contemporary operatic production: what he considered good and untouchable (relatively little), what he rejected or adapted, and where and when he saw fit to supplement or enrich the famous or less famous works of contemporary Italian composers with his own additions. ❧

Len Rix

In Praise of Translation

It's all very odd. Down the centuries, few activities can have contributed more to the spread of civilised ideas than the work of the translator. At seminal moments in the history of knowledge—seventh-century Arabia, medieval and renaissance Europe—its role in the dissemination of learning was paramount. Yet few comparable activities seem to have attracted so much sceptical gloom. One need not be an expert on the early Church to feel sure that when St Jerome first shyly mentioned the idea of translating the Bible to his chums, there was a sagacious wagging of beards and shuffling of sandals in the dust. Slow-footed Latin couldn't possibly accommodate the quicksilver Greek, and as for those Aramaic idioms... doomed to failure, old boy.

The cynics have been at it ever since. *"Traduttore, traditore"*—the translator is a traitor, Italians merrily quip. "Translations can be either accurate or beautiful", we are warned, "but never both". Such witticisms have acquired gravitas from speculative psychology. It is now all a matter of sublimated plagiarism, the expression of an impulse rooted in infantile compulsions—the urge to imitate, the pleasures of lying, and simple greed. Where translation into English is concerned, this greed takes the form of latter-day imperialism, the dominant world language appropriating the wealth of smaller nations the way its statesmen once carved up Africa. Why else should it aspire to read as if originally written in English? Consider the case of Joseph Brodsky.

When Brodsky first arrived in the USA he was widely fêted and all the best poets rushed to translate his work. The result was impressive. It was all very flattering, and he was rather pleased. But later he understood what they had actually done. They

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Len Rix

was born in Zimbabwe, and studied languages before reading English at Cambridge, where he now lives. His translation of The Queen's Necklace *will appear later this year, to join his other versions of work by Antal Szerb:* Oliver VII *(2008),* The Pendragon Legend *(2006) and* Journey by Moonlight *(2001, all for Pushkin Press), and* A Martian's Guide to Budapest *(*The Hungarian Quarterly, *No. 180). In 2006 he was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize and awarded the Oxford–Weidenfeld Translation Prize for his translation of* The Door *by Magda Szabó.*

had simply annexed his material for their own purposes, bending his subjects to the service of their own, rather different, vision. He felt used, betrayed: indeed, "colonised". The inference drawn was that the only sort of literary translation deserving respect would therefore be "rough". Like modern brutalist architecture, it should lay bare the working structure, plumbing and all, and make no pretensions to artistry, or even readability, in its own right. With luck, it might be so unreadable as to deter the reader completely: in which case he would immediately rush off to learn the original language in order to discover what he had missed. That was the theory.

We must not make light of the difficulties. The whole subject is a minefield. Booby traps lie in the most elementary words. "Land", "sea", "apple" or "grape" may look innocent, but for different cultures they carry very different charges—a nightmare when translating titles. What about objects that exist in one tradition but have no equivalent in another? *Komatál, kámea?* Does one assist with an explanatory circumlocution, or leave the mystery and power of the original to speak for itself? And as for those proverbs and idiomatic phrases! Between Hungarian and English they do sometimes coincide, or seem near enough to be recognisable; but here lies another ambush, especially for non-native translators, apt to seize triumphantly on some striking English idiom that seems to meet the situation perfectly—but doesn't quite. A series of these little slips can reduce the text to farce, and its author to the level of a clown. Add to this the current mania for updating "old-style" colloquialisms with some smart contemporary buzzword, and you destroy the quality of temporal and cultural distance that is so important. There are now publishers who issue "readability" directives to their editors, and install programmes designed to root out such self-evident defects as unusual syntax, repetitions of words and potential obscenities. I once had an editor who attempted to remove all adverbs from the text (not, apparently, in the "house style"). Naturally, she had no idea what was in the Hungarian.

The entry of Hungarian into the discussion provides further scope for gloom. Locked up in the magyar tongue lies a rich store of literary art. It is the product of a unique historical experience, refracted through the minds of serious and thoughtful artists, and has much to offer those countries loosely designed as "The West", especially the English-speaking West, whose past has been so very different. All this treasure house requires is to be translated.

In fact that task has been underway for around a century, at the rate of about one novel a year. More recently, the rate has shot up to around two per year, counting UK titles only, supplemented by a handful of excellent volumes of verse and short-story writing, mostly originating from Hungary itself. It is hard to resist the notion that Western publishers have been twiddling their thumbs.

British publishing houses (the situation is rather better in Germany, France and Italy) are notoriously unwilling to risk work from 'obscure' languages like Hungarian. They lack advice, and are reluctant to take it when offered, especially by potential translators. When a foreign novel wins some wildly prestigious prize

in France, and achieves a very large profit, they make a thoughtful note. They might even venture a translation of the fêted title into English. But, even when the acclaimed author is heaped with further prizes, they hesitate before the next, crucial, step, of following up with more from the same hand in order to consolidate the readership. For that is what is needed: not a series of one-off successes, but an ever-growing audience who will purchase each new book by a writer they know, share it with their friends, and give it as presents. There are, it is true, a small number of houses who break ranks and are prepared to risk their money in the cause of admitting European literature into the English mainstream. But the general picture is one of passionate aspiration by the less well-funded, and an institutional reluctance by the bigger names to get involved. They see no commercial reason why they should, and remind us that they are not after all charities. But there was a time, ended quite recently, when an old-fashioned notion of duty to enlighten prevailed. And, in truth, the level of risk is far smaller than they realise.

This is because, despite yet more fashionable gloom, an audience for literature in translation—even from Hungarian—does exist. For all the dumbing down of mass entertainment in Britain today, reading thrives. There is an army out there of educated readers, including many thousands of university graduates in the arts and languages, and indeed sciences, busily sharing their enthusiasm in book groups up and down the land. Their tastes are broad and sympathetic. They are guided by personal recommendation, but also, crucially, by perceptive and often surprisingly well informed reviewers. These last, writing not only in such learned periodicals as *The Times Literary Supplement* and the *London Review of Books,* but, more importantly perhaps, in the better newspapers, are often themselves leading novelists, academics or established critics. Even such less considered magazines as *Vogue* or *Gay Review* might single out some new work in translation, with a disproportionate effect on sales.

And these books do sell. Antal Szerb's *Journey by Moonlight,* put out by tiny Pushkin Press, has reprinted five times in seven years, with an accumulating print run of over 30,000 copies to date. For each sale, assume three or four other readers. Add those who have purchased Szerb's other two novels—also going strong—and combine it with the steady following for Kertész and Márai that has also sprung up, and you see the potential.

Nor should we fret about the supposed British parochialism in these matters. Sceptics brandish the statistic that whereas in Germany 40 per cent of new books are in translation, and in France 30 per cent, in Britain the figure hovers around 3 per cent. But those numbers are a poor measure of insularity. Britain may not be as well connected with the Continent as we would wish, but it takes a lively interest in the rest of the world generally. Titles that do not need translating flood in from a former Empire of more than a billion English speakers, most of them from cultures far more remote than those of Central Europe. The German numbers, on the other hand, include a mass of routine technical and other

imports from English and the other major languages. Statistics miss the point. What matters is that anything of quality, including work from Hungary, will be sympathetically reviewed, and it will sell. It is a huge and diverse market.

Ah, but who is to do all this translating? Why are so very few people involved? It obviously takes a rather unusual, indeed rather odd sort of person, qualified by a unique combination of advantages and defects.

His first "advantage" is that he comes cheap. It is hardly possible to live on what a translator is paid, if one is to do seriously thoughtful work. The grim advice not to give up your day job applies, though one or two brave souls have indeed gone down this route. In the past, literary translation was the task of the gentleman amateur, or the hard-working schoolteacher or college lecturer, burning the midnight oil. The latter was my own route. Now in retirement, life is easier, earning at the same sort of rate as those of my fellow-pensioners who do odd-jobbing in other people's gardens: an interesting parallel. The low rate of return, to be fair, is partly because I am an obsessive polisher, checking and revising every sentence as if it were the line of a poem, and invest far more time than others might have to spare, or think appropriate: but that is my choice.

So far so gloomy. We had better ask, why should anyone bother? What indeed is there left to praise? In view of the seemingly insurmountable technical difficulties mentioned earlier, can there even be such a thing as a "good" translation—and indeed: "good for what"? To answer such questions, we need to go back into history. Not to the busy heydays of translation in the ancient past, but to more recent, and perhaps more relevant, times.

As late as the early twentieth century, the general English reader knew nothing of the great Russian novelists. This was before the work of people like Constance Garnett. Garnett, a secondary-school teacher with a background in the Greek and Roman classics, came late to the Russian language, always needed help with difficulties, made elementary blunders, passed over phrases she did not understand, and, according to our friend Brodsky, conflated all the narrative voices into one. At some point or another she broke every rule in the purist's book. But she fully grasped the depth and majesty of the originals, and conveyed it to her readers in magnificent literary prose. It was enough to create a huge readership, and did much to foster the enthusiasm for all things Russian that became so important in this country before and during the Second World War.

Much the same was done for Chinese thought by Arthur Waley, whose version of Confucius' *Analects,* according to Simon Leys (the distinguished Belgian Sinologist Pierre Ryckmans), "contains some flagrant mistakes and several debatable interpretations but is written in admirable English", and won over another vast readership for the material—as opposed to the later, more philologically reliable, version of D. C. Lau, which Leys describes as appearing to "have been composed on a computer, by a computer".

The life-and-death difference between them lies in two areas: the greater sensibility of the translator, and his or her gift as a writer *per se*. The comparison is with two pianists performing an impassioned Chopin sonata. One might miss the odd note but transmit the full force of the music; the other, a meticulous technician, misses none, and leaves his audience cold.

The requirement of sensibility is a rather special one. It has something in common with Keats' "negative capability", that capacity for self-submersion into the life "out there"; in this case, into the imaginative world of the chosen author. At times this can amount to an extreme form of identification with the work. Happy the translator who comes upon a text that touches him in that particular way.

It is what might turn him into a co-creator, easing the demand that he be something of a writer himself. There are those who argue that it is far more important that the translator be master of his own language than of the one he is working from. But he should not be the sort of writer, like so many poets and novelists, whose art consists of reshaping the world in terms of their own obsessions—the sort who so impressively misunderstood what Brodsky was saying. Rather, like Garnett and Waley, they are not especially "born writers", but have writing thrust upon them. Not so much failed writers, as writers *manqués*.

What Waley and Garnett also confirm is that—especially in the early stages of one culture's awakening to the tradition of another—the literary quality of the translation matters far more than occasional minor infidelities to the letter, as opposed to the spirit, of the original. Written as literature, it must read as literature. This is not to say one should impose some standardised notion of what constitutes "good" English on the text (like my editor who feared that adverbs might lower the tone). As always, the best English is the most appropriate, and the translator needs to be enough of a language stylist to be able to follow his author wherever he leads. It is not a purely philological exercise.

So the demands on our poor translator continue to grow. In addition to the mastery of his own language, and degree of affinity with his chosen author, he needs some expertise as a critic. The more he understands about the work in hand and its nature, its cultural antecedents and its internal workings, the better. A training in literary analysis is arguably of as much importance to him as his background in linguistics. One thinks of the way Tolstoy was patronised for his supposedly workmanlike style, and was sometimes translated in the same spirit, because so little was understood of his use of traditional rhetorical techniques. If the translator does not know about, and therefore fails to spot, a simple schematic device like chiasmus, he is hardly likely to reflect it in his version.

It helps too, if he is quick to notice mimesis, rhythms that directly evoke the life of the thing described; or shifts in the authorial voice, as it slides in and out of the *style indirect libre*. He should be aware that objects and scenes can take

on a symbolic resonance, that themes and motifs will exist, and do so within larger structural patterns. It may be necessary to signal connections with parallel moments or situations elsewhere in the novel, or even in other works by the same writer: these can subtly affect the colour and tone of phrasing. Most difficult of all is to spot hidden parodies—or the deeper purposes they might serve. Szerb's *The Pendragon Legend* is a case in point.

It has been observed that no one reads a novel as closely as a translator: perhaps not even the author himself. A single page can absorb you for hours. Sometimes, with an occasionally convoluted writer like Magda Szabó, a single sentence might exercise you on and off for a whole week. This relentlessly minute scrutiny exposes every minor slip, those moments when the attention of even the finest writer may wander. Sometimes these can be smoothed over, like Szerb's tiny lapse in *Journey by Moonlight,* where he places the little Protestant cemetery in Rome just *outside* the city walls *(a város falain túl)* when in fact it lies just inside. With the discretion of a gentleman's valet, I rendered this as "beside" the city walls. There were many more such moments with Szabó's *The Door*: for example where the author succeeds in guillotining a French Huguenot a century before the instrument was invented. But to "correct" that venial error would have meant serious intrusion, since the fact of beheading carried consequences for a later scene. Besides, Szabó's occasional inattention to detail constitutes one of that powerful book's many charms.

Charm is one of the main reasons why we do it. Whatever its status as a form of creative writing, translation is a constant source of joy. The process is all discovery. The prime agent of revelation is the Hungarian language itself: with its extraordinary syntax, its special rules for assigning stress, its insistence on sequencing phrases in every way impossible in English. Each problem is a fresh challenge to invention. The narrower vocabulary, where nuance is conveyed as much by context as anything else, together with its indifference to pronouns, plunge one into an endless search for the precise English equivalent, if only to avoid repetitions—not a blunder in some languages, but intolerable in English. In fact, so different are the two languages, and so unconnected their vocabularies, it has the enormous advantage of seeming to present the translator with *carte blanche*—the raw meaning, naked experience itself, unmediated through the confusing battery of verbal echoes presented by such closer languages as French or Italian. With those tongues, so intimately related to English, the act of translation becomes an elaborate verbal dance—picking out the *mot juste,* sidestepping the *faux amis,* a minuet of innuendoes. Working with a truly "Martian" language—no more glorious example than Hungarian—one seems so much closer to life itself, unmediated by familiar or half-familiar diction. The translator has been given the material, in all its minutest particularity. Now he can delight in the illusion that all he has to do is write the book, as if for the first time. ❧

Tim Wilkinson

Rough Crossing

Literary Canons and Translation

A couple of months ago, having lighted on a copy of Henry Miller's *The Air-conditioned Nightmare*, that entertainingly episodic account of a trip the author made across America, following his return in 1941 from a memorable decade (it spawned not only the *Tropic of Cancer* but also the devastatingly amusing *Tropic of Capricorn*) spent as an expatriate in Europe, mostly Paris, I came across as neat a summary as I could hope to find of the predicament I find myself in:

> The other night, at the home of a Hungarian friend, I fell into a discussion with him about the exile and the émigré... "It's strange," I said, "that you should bring me to this window. Do you know what I thought of as I sat there? I was thinking of another window, in Budapest, where I stood one evening and caught my first glimpse of the city. You hate Budapest. You had to run away from it. And to me it seemed like a magical place. I loved it instantly. I was at home there. In fact, I feel at home everywhere, except in my native land. Here I feel alien, especially here in New York, my birthplace."

Having myself undertaken several vaguely comparable excursions, it came rather forcefully to mind while I was ordering thoughts for a modest celebration of the centenary of the foundation of the literary journal *Nyugat* (West). For just over 33 years, *Nyugat* was undoubtedly the main (though not the only) channel for providing an influential platform for new voices in Hungarian poetry and prose.

Tim Wilkinson,

Yorkshire bred, is the translator of a range of works on history and culture. Among his translations of literary works by contemporary Hungarian writers, five volumes by Imre Kertész have appeared in the USA and UK. His translation of Fatelessness *was awarded the 43rd Annual PEN Club/Book of the Month Translation Prize for 2005.*

It was pure coincidence that a Hungarian friend chose that moment to e-mail to me the copy of an afterword he had written for a new edition of what I believe was the first extended prose work to be written by a certain Dezső Szomory. The afterword starts off by noting that *Nyugat,* in the 20th issue of its 1914 run, published the first instalment of a series under the working title of "Harry Russel-Dorsan harctéri levelei" (Harry Russel-Dorsan's Front-line Dispatches), announcing this with the explanatory statement:

> A happy chance has conveyed to our hands a bundle of issues of the London *Evening Standard,* in which Harry Russel-Dorsan, that outstanding English newspaper's war correspondent, in a long series of articles, tracks, with diary-style immediacy, events in the Franco–German War from the moment Sir John French set out at the head of the British Expeditionary Force to the aid of France. Reports written about recent wars by a number of French and Italian journalists, with their own artistic pretensions, have made of this a veritable literary genre so to say, and Russel-Dorsan likewise seems to emulate that model—albeit with supreme mastery, one has to say. In our opinion, these are astoundingly original, at times extremely diverting pieces of writing, charged with English trenchancy—in some places virile and striking, in others appealingly sparing. Mainly through their unusual sensibility, they perhaps surpass anything of the type hitherto written. That is why we are publishing them here, for the time being the very beginning of these dispatches, and sadly in but rough-and-ready translation at that. Even so, we feel sure that they will create some stir. [signed] *Nyugat.*

This ran for 24 consecutive (biweekly) issues until issue 13 of 1915, with a concluding part ("Harry Russel-Dorsan in Paris") in issue 24 of 1917. The following year, it was published in book form, with minor amendments, by *Nyugat* (which from the start also operated as a book-publishing concern), as *Harry Russel-Dorsan a francia hadszíntérről* (Harry Russel-Dorsan from the French Theatre of Operations). In fact, the texts as well as the above prefatory explanation were a 'cod' produced by Szomory himself (but obviously endorsed by *Nyugat*'s editors). Though this is a strongly anti-war piece of writing, Szomory is nowadays best known (or even only known) for a novel that he published a decade later: *A párizsi regény* (The Paris Novel) of 1929. Which immediately raises the question of how does (or did) the Hungarian literary establishment—never mind their British and American counterparts—decide what works are worth putting out? What can be regarded as canonic?

As far as Szomory goes, my friend is doing his bit by pushing through publication of a series of new editions by Múlt és Jövő Publishers. Quite independently of each other, however, it had transpired some months ago (it may explain the friendship) that both my friend and I had picked up a fleeting reference to Szomory in a single sentence that Imre Kertész quotes in his highly diverting memoir, *K. dosszié* (The K File), which appeared in Hungarian and German towards to the end of 2006:

"Not everybody who is born is in the world," writes Dezső Szomory in that marvellous 1934 novel of his, *Professor Horeb.*

It is a striking enough sentence to make me wonder whether Szomory's novel (and that sentence in particular) had any bearing on Kertész's haunting *Kaddish for an Unborn Child,*[1] which among other things is about somebody who is unborn but nevertheless in the world. Although Kertész, post-Nobel, has at last achieved some visibility in the English language, certainly as compared with most contemporary Hungarian authors, it would be fair to say that he is not yet seen as a must-read author for English readers who are interested in modern literature. It is not just his recent autobiographical *The K File* that has not appeared in English translation, but also his second novel *A kudarc* (The Failure, 1988), or indeed two earlier autobiographical works: *Gályanapló* (Galley-Boat Log, 1992) and *Valaki más* (Someone Else, 1997).

To show that quoting Szomory is not just a Kertész thing, let me throw in a passage by László Márton, a Hungarian author of whom I first became aware some 25 years ago, soon after the publication of his first short-story collection,[2] and who still has had none of his books translated into English, despite a growing list of truly impressive novels on diverse range of subjects, along with a recent second collection of shorter stories.[3] The passage in question comes from *Shady High Street,* a novel about the contrasting fates of two Jewish schoolgirls, Gaby Gőz and Goldie Roth, who in the late Thirties attend secondary school in the small, north-Hungarian, Danubian-bank town of Szécsény (it isn't actually named, but enough clues are given to pin it down precisely[4]):

> ...in most books Árpád Gőz [Gaby's father]—who didn't just sell books but read them too—came across plenty of slackness and unthinking conceit; 'traditional' books struck him as just fatuously trite, the 'modern' ones as strident, aggressive twaddle [...] in 1915 he had been called up, sent off to the front, and after that there was no question of acquiring his own bookshop, while in early 1920, on account of his father's part in the previous year's events, the liquor licence had been revoked from Gőz senior. The authorities, after some wrangling, had been willing to reissue it to Árpád Gőz, but only on condition that, besides running the restaurant, he sold nothing more than foodstuffs or bottled drinks. As a young man [...] he had imagined that he would invite to his bookshop the most distinguished Hungarian writers, Géza Gárdonyi and Sándor Bródy, indeed Dezső Szomory and Ferenc Herczeg too, but by the time he found himself

1 ■ New York: Vintage Books, 2004. It has yet to be published in the UK.

2 ■ *A Nagy-budapesti Rém-üldözés.* Budapest: Magvető, 1984, with a second, expanded edition by Pécs: Jelenkor, 1995.

3 ■ *Amit láttál, amit hallottál.* Pécs: Jelenkor, 2008. An English translation of the title story ("What You Saw, What You Heard") appeared in *HQ* 192.

4 ■ *Árnyas főutca.* Pécs: Jelenkor, 1999. This is in fact based on a genuine memoir published shortly afterwards by Irén Ács: *Őrizd meg...* Budapest: Liget Könyvek, 2000, which has appeared in English translation as *Keep it Safe! Jewish Life in a Hungarian Town.* Oxford: Boulevard Books, 2004.

behind the counter in the restaurant, Bródy had fallen out with Gárdonyi, and both of them had died; Szomory was playing the piano naked on a fifth-floor flat in Sütő Street, between a Vizsoly Bible and a Chinese vase depicting Buddha; Ferenc Herczeg by then had become an officially supported writer, and even if Árpád Gőz had owned his own bookshop, it was far from sure that Herczeg would have been willing to go there.

Despite the powerful pages that Szomory strung together, *Harry Dorsan-Russel* is perhaps an object lesson in how works of the imagination do need to respect prosaic fact (it is hard to conceive of a newspaper in any country, even back in the time of the Crimean War, allowing a war correspondent to write such lengthily florid 'mood pieces', let alone pay for him to travel abroad with a manservant and pet dog). For a more potent Hungarian view of World War I, the best example is *Fekete kolostor* by Aladár Kuncz (1931), also a non-combatant but one who underwent internment as an enemy alien in France. His deeply disillusioned memoir was translated into English with astonishing rapidity.[5] Although Géza Csáth served as a doctor on both the Serbian and Russian fronts in 1914–15 and is one of the few post-Jókai Hungarians writers who has achieved any lasting recognition for English readers,[6] he produced no literary works that dealt with the war experiences. So far as I am aware, Hungary produced no author to digest the sometimes quite horrifying events on, say, the Italian front in World War I to match E. E. Cummings's *The Enormous Room,* which is also of course a non-combatant's view (volunteer in the Ambulance Corps in France before the US entered the war), or Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That,* let alone—just to show that the Great War was not one-sided—Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* or, for that matter, Céline's *Journey to the End of the Night.* Nevertheless, as an example of where sheer imagination can make up for lack of direct personal involvement, I have argued recently that Ernő Szép—known by English readers for his *The Smell of Humans. Memoir of the Holocaust in Hungary*[7]—provided an almost totally overlooked post-war response.[8] (Dezső Tandori, a vocal advocate for Szép's poetry over several decades, and himself a formidably gifted and prolific poet, writer, and also literary translator of leading modern authors in English (both UK and US) and German, has nevertheless been resolutely ignored by English-language publishers, though hopefully the contributions to the forthcoming issue of *HQ* will help to demonstrate that a formidable talent is something to rejoice in, rather than fear.)

5 ■ *Black Monastery.* London: Chatto & Windus, 1934.

6 ■ *Opium and Other Stories.* Penguin, 1983; *The Magician's Garden,* Columbia UP, 1980. See in *HQ* 186 Erzsébet Bori's review of János Szász's film *Opium—The Diary of a Madwoman,* which is based on Csáth's experiences after being discharged from military service for the morphine dependency that he acquired while still a student.

7 ■ Central European University Press, 1994. Translated by John Batki.

8 ■ "Man's Greatest Crime" *Hungarian Literature Online* (www.hlo.hu), 21 October 2008.

So far I have merely pointed to a scattering of Hungarian authors who, with the exception of Imre Kertész, have attracted no attention from English publishers over the last century. Before we preen ourselves and say "Well, one can't possibly check everything out!", let me just relay a rather sobering statistic. In 2008 the "three percent" weblog set up a database of all the US-published translations into English that it can track down from any other language (including Hungarian). The most recent data at time of writing (www.rochester.edu/College/translation/three per cent for October 31st, 2008). suggested that in the whole of the past year to end October 2008 a total of just 261 new fiction titles (i.e. excluding re-translations, paperback issues of hardbacks, all poetry, etc.) were published in English translation. Given that a total of around 8,000 fiction titles were published in the US over the whole of 2007 (and this is apparently growing year by year), this means that of just over 150 new fiction titles published every week in the USA, just five (3 per cent) were translations. And 2008 happens to have been an exceptionally good year for US publications of Hungarian fiction, with no less than six titles appearing in English during the year—or in plain language, somewhat under 0.1 percent of all fiction titles published in the US during 2008 (and presumably less in the UK) originated from Hungarian authors. Moreover (2008 was atypical in many respects), four of the five authors in question—Attila Bartis, György Dragomán, Ferenc Karinthy (son of Frigyes to save later confusion), Imre Kertész (two titles) and Péter Zilahy—are still living and writing.

Those figures speak volumes, so I will resist the temptation to make the usual comparisons with the situation in Germany. Was it any better 70, 80, 90 years ago? At the end of the Sixties, Magda Czigány researched and published a fairly complete listing of Hungarian novels that had been published in English translation in the UK over the previous century and a half.[9] Filleting out the 31 years from 1908 to 1939, which covers pretty much the entire lifespan of *Nyugat,* one gets a good picture of the meagre impact *Nyugat* had in the English-speaking world.

It seems that the 31 years saw the publication of a total of 33 translated novels from 21 Hungarian writers—almost exactly one title per year. I don't know if books published in America would add any, but I would be surprised if there were even that many. Three of the 33 titles—*The Strange Story of Rab Ráby* and *Yellow Rose,* both in 1909, and *Manasseh* in 1910—represent the tail-end of the vogue for the novels of Maurus (Mór) Jókai—he died just a few years earlier, in 1904—which saw something like three dozen titles of his prolific oeuvre published in English over a 60-year period from 1854. (It is debatable, but would entail far more work than it is worth, whether any of the Englished "Jókai" books of that vintage were genuine translations, as opposed to very free adaptations or abridgements.) Otherwise the big sellers, also with three titles each, were Jolán

9 ■ Magda Czigány: *Hungarian Literature in English Translation Published in Great Britain, 1830–1968.* London: Szepsi Csombor Literary Circle, 1969.

Földes, who added another four titles during her brief spell of popularity, and Lajos Zilahy, two popular writers who went on to notch up a total of at least six titles. The next five authors, with two titles each, were Mihály Földi, Zsolt Harsányi, Ferenc Körmendi, Ferenc Molnár and Cécile Tormay. Of the remaining 15 authors, who included Aladár Kuncz with the above-mentioned *Black Monastery,* only four were unarguably from the *Nyugat* "stable": Lajos Hatvany (*Bondy Jr* of 1932); Dezső Kosztolányi (*Nero,* 1928; seven years after the original Hungarian edition [see the later reference to the now better-known *Anna Édes* of 1926]); and the splendidly named Vernon Duckworth Barker's translation of Frigyes Karinthy's *A Journey Round My Skull* (1939), just two years after it appeared in Hungary. To those four one might add, at most, Ferenc Móra with *Song of the Wheatfields* (1931 in English).

If one looks at Hungarian novels that have been published in English translation over the last 20 years (perhaps it does no harm to mention that 1989 was, of course, a year that marked the start of Hungary's full throwing-off of Soviet vassalage, and also the sad death by his own hand of Sándor Márai), there are several notable features. It is certainly striking that over this period very nearly 50 titles (by my count) were published in the main English-language markets of the USA and UK, pushing the rate up to the dizzying heights of 2.5 titles per year! Not so evident is that those were from a total of 26 authors, split half-and-half between works from living authors and posthumous translations. At least as significantly, the average time-delay for the transit from Hungarian to English for all 50 fiction titles put out over the last 20 years has gone up almost tenfold (to 32 years), which is made up of an average of 55 years for now dead authors, and as much as 11 years even for living authors. There are, no doubt, cogent cases to be argued for putting out the new translation by George Szirtes (1991) of Kosztolányi's *Anna Édes* (1926), over forty years after Adam de Hegedüs's efforts with *Wonder Maid* (1947); or Charlotte Franklin's rendering of the Margit Kaffka classic *The Ant Heap* (1917), put out by Marion Boyars in 1995 or Zsigmond Móricz's *Be Faithful unto Death* (1920); or even the recycling of Karinthy's *A Journey Round My Skull* by Faber in 1990 and by the New York Review Books Classics in 2008. However, anyone who is persuaded of the wealth of Hungarian prose fiction that has emerged over the last 30–40 years can only be puzzled by publishers' collective hesitancy (shyness?) over work by living Hungarians.

To put it more concretely, it seems that English readerships in the UK and US can be persuaded that they have been missing translations of such works (in chronological order of their first appearance) as Sándor Márai's *Embers* (1942), *Conversations/Casanova in Bolzano* (1940) and *The Rebels* (1930), or Antal Szerb's *Journey by Moonlight* (1937), *The Pendragon Legend* (1934) and *Oliver VII* (1941). That is to say nothing of (Count) Miklós Bánffy's trilogy of *They Were Counted...* (1935), *They Were Found Wanting* (1937), and *They*

Were Divided (1940), or Lajos Zilahy's *Two Prisoners* of 1926,[10] which first surfaced in English translation in 1931, then again, apparently in a different translation in 1999.

To many Hungarians, this selection is deeply (and, dare I say, rightly) puzzling not least because they have long put more store on Márai's early autobiographical *Egy polgár vallomásai* (Confessions of a Bourgeois, 1934), and the four volumes of his *Journal* published during his 40-year exile by various émigré presses,[11] though admittedly a separate 1944–45 memoir published in Hungarian (in Toronto) in 1972 did actually make it into English.[12] At least as important, though, many would range alongside Márai's aforementioned *Confessions of a Bourgeois,* is Gyula Illyés's *People of the Puszta,* (1936), the 1967 English translation of which was a pretty boring read; and the eight-volume *Egy ember élete* (One Man's Life, 1927–35) by Lajos Kassák, a truly avant-garde artist and poet,[13] whom I remember best for his astonishing free-verse poem (or prose poem) "The Horse Dies, the Birds Fly Away" of 1922[14]. Lóránt Czigány rightly refers to it (*Oxford History of Hungarian Literature,* p. 346) as: "The best of his poetry during his exile, his most active period... This poem, of 500-odd lines, is a turning point in modern Hungarian poetry..."

But, I hear people consoling each other, at least half of the works published in the USA and UK (in this instance treated as a single area) in English translation over the last twenty years are from living authors. True, there is also a marked upward shift in the quality of what has been on offer—certainly as compared with 70, 80 or 90 years ago. The most frequently translated Hungarian writer in this period (1989–2008) was Péter Esterházy (six titles) followed by Imre Kertész (five titles, not counting the first 'renderings' of *Fateless* and *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*), then Péter Nádas (three titles) and László Krasznahorkai (two titles), plus a dozen contemporary writers who have lived to see at least one of their books into an English edition. About five years ago I put together a quick survey of these and a dozen more authors whom I thought merited attention,[15] noting that I would have no trouble in assembling a case for twenty more if it comes to individuality of voice and standpoint, not

10 ■ Lajos Zilahy (1890–1974) is no relation to Péter Zilahy (b. 1970), the author of *Az utolsó ablakzsiráf*; translated, by Tim Wilkinson, as *The Last Window-Giraffe*. London, New York & Delhi: Anthem Press, 2008).

11 ■ *Napló 1945–1957* (Washington, D.C., 1958); 1958–1967 (Rome, 1968); 1968–1975 (Toronto, 1976); 1976–1983 (Munich, 1984); 1984–1989 (Budapest 1997); see *HQ* 171–173 for brief extracts that cover the whole period of exile.

12 ■ Sándor Márai: *Memoir of Hungary, 1944–1948.* Transl. Albert Tezla. Budapest: Corvina & Central European University Press, 1996.

13 ■ For an affectionate tribute, see Ágnes Nemes Nagy: "Kassák Sketches," *HQ* 186, pp. 3–5.

14 ■ Published in *HQ* 186 in the translation of Edwin Morgan.

15 ■ "Letter from Hungary. A Quiet Revolution: Hungarian Fiction since 1975," *Context,* No. 14 (November 2003). Chicago & Normal, Ill.: Center for Book Culture-Dalkey Archive Press, on-line edition at http://www.dalkeyarchive.com/context.

to mention sheer inventiveness—in several cases over a couple of decades or more. This is not the place to make that case, but a glaring statistic is that the average delay for works by living writers is now 11 years—nearly four times longer than the delay in the period 1908–1939!

Let me note that 2008 marked the centenary of the birth not just of *Nyugat* but also of the phenomenal writer Miklós Szentkuthy (1908–88). He was far too independently minded to come from any "stable". But he was, however, an English specialist and became close friends with the somewhat older Antal Szerb; also studied in England for a year or so to complete a thesis (on Ben Jonson); and in 1934, barely in his mid-twenties, published a work entitled *Prae,* which is a staggering assault on modernist thinking about the novel (it would clock in at something over half a million words (a tad longer than, say, Musil's *Man Without Qualities*). Szerb was, in fact, one of the earliest and most perceptive advocates of this and Szentkuthy's immediately succeeding works. The early parts of *Szent Orpheus Breviáriuma* (Saint Orpheus Breviary), the work that Szentkuthy himself considered his *magnum opus,* he started to publish at his own expense in 1939. A snippet is "worth the detour":

> The scene itself is unforgettable: a church next to the water, like a swimming box of relics, the steps meeting the green paludial liquid like coins that have slipped just a nuance further out from an overturned stack of money; their prows jammed together, gondolas lurch in one place, around the gate, like miffed-necked black swans around an invisible morsel (the church is small, the whole thing no more than a boudoir, in which the women, in their balloon silks, are thrown willy-nilly on each other), the lagoon's marsh reeks, an oily fish smell billowing out from the eating-houses, many perfumes and stifling hard liquor concentrated into a single Catholic dogma—that's Casanova's world.[16]

Marginalia to Casanova itself is of average novel length in English (80,000 words), but the nine completed books that make up the entire *Saint Orpheus Breviary* will work out at around one million words (and that is perhaps less than one quarter of Szentkuthy's prolific literary output).

Having got myself into such choppy waters, however, let me make a deft leap to a very much contemporary Hungarian writer who seems to have been equally successful in avoiding attention from the English-speaking world. That is László Darvasi, and particularly his 1999 epic *The Legend of the Tear-Showmen,* which will come in at a modest 200,000 words in English translation. This is not the place to go into details, simply to note that it is about five men who weep tears of different qualities ("All five of them are weeping. Blood, glowing embers, gravel, tiny mirrors and ice they cry, like infernal devils....") and unaccountably keep changing names. One other tie

16 ■ Miklós Szentkuthy: *Szent Orpheus Breviáriuma I. Széljegyzetek Casanovához* (Saint Orpheus Breviary, vol. 1. Marginalia to Casanova). Budapest: Magvető, 1973, p. 28.

that Darvasi shares with Szentkuthy is that Venice is one of the many localities that are touched by the tear-showmen, and it is again the gondolas that are a focus of attention.

> A gondola glides through the water.
>
> Black as mourning.
>
> Even the splashing of the sculls cannot be heard.
>
> From beneath the black cabin roof a horrific face observes the proud casement windows of Venice. It is taking account of dreams, the dreams of His Eminence the Doge and the notables of the Great Council just as much as the dream of Luigi Escapolo Firabolla, the foundling dwarf...
>
> "I have a plan to build the world's finest gondola," Luigi explains. "The finest gondola ever built. But it will be a dwarf gondola. Now, stick by me."
>
> "What is the reason for the disturbance?" the Doge glances up abstractedly. He is right in the middle of writing an epistle to His Majesty the Sun King to offer a deal in respect of certain former Venetian territories. If Louis is willing to cede these territories, the Doge would be willing to secretly support French interests in the eastern Mediterranean. Material considerations. Sly Venetian wording, steeped in poison and playful jesting. Even a denial cannot be true.
>
> "A gondola," the scribe says softly...
>
> "It's a dwarf gondola, sire," the secretary clears his throat, not daring to look his master in the face. He looks at his fingers instead. Speaks to them.
>
> "Oh, like that," the doge cracks a relieved smile. "Deception."[17]

Darvasi and Szentkuthy, László Márton and Dezső Tandori—just four writers who would grace any literary canon, and it is sad to record that they, and forty others, still await discovery in English. The almost one-way traffic—from English to Hungarian—was summed up superbly by historian András D. Bán (1962–2001) in the main work that he was able to complete before his untimely death.[18] He was acutely aware of just how much of a road-block lay in the opposite direction, using a rather telling quotation from an essay by László Cs. Szabó as the epigraph to his book:

> ...an Englishman has no ulterior motives, does not exploit his friends, and does not stab his enemies in the back. He has no word for *Schadenfreude, machismo* or *flânerie;* he is obliging, straight dealing, courteous. No one can make him out, however. He is impermeable to the continental way of thinking. ❧

17 ■ László Darvasi: *A könnymutatványosok legendája.* Pécs: Jelenkor, 1999, pp. 96, 100 and passim to p. 560.

18 ■ *Hungarian–British Diplomacy 1938–1941: the Attempt to Maintain Relations.* London & Portland; Oregon: Frank Cass, especially Chapter 10. ("Anglophilia in Hungary and Anglo–Hungarian Intellectual Exchanges") pp. 170–175.

Péter Rácz

A House of Their Own

The Translator's House in Balatonfüred

In this age of globalisation, a Translators' House is a sign of the times. What is a Translators' House? It's a place where the translator of a poem, play, essay, story or novel written in the local language can go, for some weeks, to work on, finish, and/or polish his/her translation into another language, usually his/her own mother tongue. Not surprisingly, small languages are the most likely to establish Translators' Houses: the one in Amsterdam, dedicated to the translation of Dutch literature into the world languages, is a case in point.

The Hungarian Translators' House is located in Balatonfüred, the oldest resort town along Lake Balaton. Mineral water with medicinal properties was found in Füred in the early 18th century, and people were soon coming to drink the waters, and bathe in them. But it was only about a century later, in what would come to be called Hungary's Age of Reform, that the town became a full-fledged resort, boasting also a summer theatre for holidaymakers' amusement. In 1831, the old wooden structure was replaced by a permanent building; in keeping with the ongoing linguistic revival, it was one of the first theatres in the country where plays and operettas were put on in Hungarian, not German.

The beautifully-restored neo-Classical buildings lining the lakeside promenade—the writer Mór Jókai's villa and the singer Lujza Blaha's house among them—conjure up the bustling cultural life of Balatonfüred in the second half of the 19th century, when artists and writers rubbed shoulders with the financial and political élite all summer long at the theatre, on the beach and at the Yacht Club.

No. 36 Petőfi Sándor Street, which houses the Translators' House, is just a few minutes' walk from the promenade. One of the main streets of old Füred, Petőfi Sándor Street is a busy thoroughfare today. And yet, as one passes through the

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Péter Rácz,

is a poet and translator whose translations include works by Kierkegaard and Martin Buber. He is president of the Foundation of the Hungarian Translators' House.

gate to approach the House, one fancies that the front yard has trees and bushes venerable enough to block out the traffic, and make disappear the hundred years that have elapsed since the house was first built. Above the entrance, one finds the inscription: *Lipták Ház.* The story of the house is worth telling.

The house had belonged to the Lipták family, being built by the grandparents of Gábor Lipták's wife. Gábor Lipták (1912–1985), who had a degree in agriculture and worked in agricultural marketing until the Second World War, moved to Füred after the war. By that time, his wife's grandmother was living alone in the house, and they went to live with her. When she died, they had the house to themselves.

At least in theory. In practice, they regularly had all their nieces and nephews spend their summer holidays at the house, whose parents, of course, would be there at weekends. By that time, Gábor Lipták, who had always been more comfortable with literature and the arts than his own *métier,* was writing children's stories and travel guides on the Balaton region. He had made some literary friends, and soon word was out that the Liptáks of Balatonfüred were holding open house. As András Lipták, one of Gábor Lipták's nephews, remembers it: "No one in Hungary who counted in literature or the arts would miss dropping in on Gábor Lipták and his wife at Petőfi Sándor Street if they as much as passed through Balatonfüred, for it was a real literary salon."

The guest books which Lipták kept over the years tell the story—as does *Nyitott kapu* (Open Door), the book he published about these years in 1982. István Örkény, László Németh, Lőrinc Szabó, Gyula Illyés and Tibor Déry were among the regulars; János Pilinszky, Sándor Weöres, Miklós Borsos, Aurél Bernáth, István Vas, Salvatore Quasimodo, Robert Graves and Amerigo Tot also turned up, as would Károly Makk, Klári Tolnay, Iván Darvas, Zoltán Latinovits and Éva Ruttkay from the world of the cinema and theatre.

It was one thing to feed two dozen or more people a weekend (though that took juggling enough), and another to find every one of them a place to sleep. The young people would pitch tents in the garden, and there were times when people slept two to a bed. Some stayed just the weekend, some came for weeks at a time. But come they did, for over thirty years: writers, poets, painters, sculptors, actors, actresses, movie directors, and people who simply loved literature and the arts, locals and those down from Budapest. Crammed with antique furniture and folk art, the Liptáks' home was a literary salon at a time when gatherings of any size were suspect. Over a glass (or more) of wine, people could talk, argue, play games, tease one another and simply enjoy each other's company—all invaluable aids to intellectual and spiritual survival in a workaday world where culture was censored and ideology prescribed.

By the late 1970's, the house was badly in need of a facelift. The Liptáks were getting on in years, so their old literary friends got together to see to, and pay for, the renovation. When Gábor Lipták died in 1985, he left the house to the Arts Foundation, with the proviso that it was to be used only for literary purposes. For

Penetrating the Market: the Last Twenty Years

Of all the works of fiction in Hungarian that have appeared since the country's transition to a multi-party democracy in 1989–90, it is two volumes by Imre Kertész and one by Ádám Bodor that have aroused the greatest interest outside the country: specifically Kertész's *Kaddish for an Unborn Child,* which has now been published in 25 languages, and *Liquidation,* which came out the year after he was awarded the Nobel Prize (it has gone into 22 languages so far). Bodor's *Sinistra körzet* (Sinistra District, 1992) has so far reached 14 languages, though not as yet English.

The liveliest interest in Hungarian fiction has come from the German-speaking world, which has seen the publication in German translation of as many as ten works by Kertész, seven by Péter Esterházy, six by László Darvasi, and five each by György Dalos, László F. Földényi and Péter Nádas. As one index of the relative difficulty of penetrating the English-speaking markets, a quick count suggests that whereas 114 Hungarian fiction titles have made it into German since 1990, just 23 reached English (and 24 French, but 29 the relatively small Dutch market). The statistics kept by the Hungarian Translation Fund indicate that globally a total of almost 300 works by 87 Hungarian authors have found places on the shelves of foreign bookstores.

Established by the Ministry of Education and Culture in 1998, the Translation Fund run by the Hungarian Book Foundation gives grants to foreign publishers for translations from Hungarian. In the ten years since it was set up, it has supported the translation of 624 books, more than 500 of which have now appeared in print. The greatest numbers of translations have been (in descending order) into Bulgarian, German, Russian, Slovak and Romanian. As far as authors go they have been for the books of (again in descending order) Sándor Márai, Imre Kertész, Péter Esterházy, Dezső Kosztolányi, Magda Szabó, Ádám Bodor, György Dragomán and Péter Nádas. Among the more exotic languages that have been helped are Bengali (Kertész), Basque (Márai), Galician (Márai and Kosztolányi), Kirghiz (the mid-nineteenth-century poet Sándor Petőfi), Armenian (the poet János Pilinszky), Udmurt (Ervin Lázár) and Hindi (Magda Szabó). ❧

years, the building was left to deteriorate, until, in 1997, the Hungarian Translators' House Foundation acquired it on a thirty-year lease from the Arts Foundation's post-1989 heir. Promptly, they set about renovating and modernising the building, and the Lipták House was again open for "business" in 1998.

The house has retained its neo-Classical exterior and pillared veranda, but has been thoroughly modernised inside. It now has six rooms, each with its own bathroom (and on-line computer), a seminar room, a library, and a large kitchen and dining room. There is also a Lipták Memorial Room, complete with antique furniture, and copies of old letters, guest books and photographs.

Practical and comfortable as it is, the Translators' House still has the

Titles and Translators

When Imre Kertész won the Nobel Prize for Literature in October 2002 hopes were raised that Hungarian writing would finally break into the English-speaking book market. That did not happen, however. Hungarian literature continues to be underrepresented in English-language markets. In Germany, by contrast, both classical and contemporary Hungarian authors are highly valued and accepted.

It is not that there is any lack of outstanding translators. Starting with Dezső Kosztolányi's *Anna Édes,* the Budapest-born, but British-raised poet George Szirtes has gone on to publish a series of important novels by Sándor Márai *(Casanova in Bolzano, The Rebels)* and László Krasznahorkai *(The Melancholy of Resistance, War and War)*; he has also translated Gyula Krúdy's short-story collection *The Adventures of Sinbad,* and co-edited, with Miklós Vajda, the Editor Emeritus of *The Hungarian Quarterly*, a 450-page anthology of post-war Hungarian prose and poetry *(An Island of Sound).* Another British translator, Tim Wilkinson, has become known primarily for his translations of Kertész's works (the novels *Fatelessness, Kaddish for an Unborn Child* and *Liquidation*; the novellas *Detective Story* and *The Pathseeker*), as well as important shorter works, *Sworn Statement* and *The Union Jack*, which appeared in the *HQ.* Len Rix, another British translator, has had a resounding success with several works by Antal Szerb (*Journey by Moonlight, The Pendragon Legend* and *Oliver VII),* and also a new translation of Magda Szabó's *The Door.*

Also born in Hungary, but in his case resident in the USA, is John Batki, who has translated the poetry of Attila József, prose works by Géza Ottlik and Iván Mándy, Ernő Szép's *The Smell of Humans,* an important (and highly ironic) memoir of forced labour in Hungary in the dying months of the Second World War, and the Gyula Krúdy novels *Sunflower* (re-issued in the NYRB Classics series in 2007) and *Ladies Day* (published by Corvina in Hungary). Also US-based, Ivan Sanders and Imre Goldstein are probably most

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atmosphere of a cultural centre. For one thing, there is the roughly four-thousand-volume library. One half of the collection is books printed in Hungary: Hungarian literature, and bilingual dictionaries, handbooks and encyclopaedia of every kind. The other half consists of handbooks in a great variety of languages, many of them donations by embassies, or parting gifts of translators who have worked in the House. Fortunately, the House's budget also allows for the acquisition of new books, primarily those recommended, or missed, by the visiting translators.

But there is also something more ubiquitous making for that cultural-centre atmosphere. With a little exaggeration, we might say that the Translators' House does double duty as a gallery of contemporary art. Both the guest rooms, the halls and the common rooms are decorated with paintings, drawings and statues, on loan from their creators for a year at a time: currently, nearly 60 works by 47 different artists are on display. So representative are these

closely associated with their joint work on Péter Nádas's major novel *Book of Memories*; Sanders was earlier the sole translator of such major works as György Konrád's *The City Builder* and *The Loser* and Milán Füst's classic *The Story of My Wife*, while Goldstein went on to translate Konrád's *A Feast in the Garden*, Nádas's *The End of a Family Story* and *Love*, and *Tranquility* by Attila Bartis. Judith Sollosy moved in the opposite direction, back from the USA to Hungary, but she has made a name for her work on various novels by Péter Esterházy, including, most recently, *Celestial Harmonies*.

Prime among a scattering of younger authors who have made it into English translation in the USA and/or UK markets was the 2008 publication of György Dragomán's *The White King*, which first appeared in Hungarian as recently as 2005 (a translation of one of the chapters was published a year earlier in *HQ* 174, another chapter appeared in *HQ* 182). The book was translated by USA-domiciled Paul Olchvary, who also takes the credit for rendering into English Károly Pap's 1938 novel *Azarel* (Pap died in Buchenwald concentration camp just before it was liberated in early 1945). To date *The White King* has been translated into 25 languages, making it one of the quickest international take-offs of all Hungarian titles.

Apart from Dragomán's success, 2008 saw the appearance of the aforementioned two Kertész novellas, Péter Zilahy's *The Last Window-Giraffe*, a volume of Péter Nádas's essays under the title *Fire and Knowledge*, as well as Ferenc Karinthy's *Metropole* and a re-issue of Frigyes Karinthy's autobiographical *Journey Around My Skull*, which first appeared in English in 1939, just two years after the first Hungarian edition.

Having said that, one cannot help wondering why no English-language publisher has picked up on the huge success that has been enjoyed in Hungary by writers such as Pál Závada with *Jadviga párnája* (Jadviga's Pillow), first published in 1997, or György Spiró, going back as far as *Az ikszek* (The Xes) of 1981, and as recently as *Fogság* (Captivity), a stunning historical novel published in 2005. ❧

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successive collections of contemporary art that the curator takes the high-school students of Balatonfüred on a tour of the building every two years.

Generally speaking, 70–80 translators receive grants to work at the House each year. A translator who wants to spend some time at the House has to submit an application to the Board of Directors: CV, work schedule, and most importantly, proof of a contract with a publisher for the translation he/she proposes to work on. However long he/she wishes to stay (one can apply for 2, 4, or 6-week stints), the Board wants to be sure that the time spent at the House will result in a published work. To date, more than 300 volumes line the shelves reserved for "House" books in the library.

Translating is a solitary business and the six translators who are guests at the House at any one time spend most of the day in their rooms, working. But in the evening, there are the common meals, often some national dish cooked (with

exotic spices and ingredients brought from home) by one of the company. At these times, the *genius loci* comes alive, and there is high-spirited discussion far into the night, as, say, a Slovak, a Russian, a Serb, a Spanish, an Austrian and a Dutch translator argue some fine point of their craft... in Hungarian.

The Hungarian linguistic milieu—and this includes contacts with the locals in shops, restaurants and pubs—is, perhaps, the most precious thing the House offers its residents, though there are guests who would give pride of place to the wealth of Hungarian sources in the library, or the opportunity to consult with the author one is translating, or again, the freedom to focus on nothing but one's work. Translators generally agree that they can work three times as effectively at the House as at home. No wonder one has to book ahead if one wants to come at some particular, favourite time of the year.

For the House has quite a few returning guests: Sava Babić and Árpád Vickó from Serbia; Tatyana Voronkina, Jurij Gusev and Vjacheslav Sereda from Russia; Karol Wlachovský from Slovakia; Adan Kovacsics from Spain; Mari Alföldy from Holland; Georg Buda from Austria; Anamaria Pop from Romania; Kari Kemeny from Norway; Tereza Worowska from Poland; Agnes Járfás from France; and Kjoseva Svetla and Martin Hristov from Bulgaria. There are also some very young returnees: the Czech Katarina Horvátová, the Israeli Avi Dekel, the Italian Monica Savoia and Renáta Deák, a translator into Slovak.

From its very inception, one of the priorities of the Hungarian Translators' House has been to foster novice translators. One-week workshops are regularly held under the guidance of an experienced translator who handpicks the 4–8 younger colleagues who will be attending, selects the texts they will all be working on, and makes recommendations as to which editors, linguists or authors should be invited to take part. The products of their week's labours—some poems, an act of a play, or a chapter of a novel—appear on the House website: www.c3.hu/forditohaz.hu, which, incidentally, also gives the statistics for the past 10 years: who has translated what at the House, and into which language. To date, workshops have been held for Spanish, Croat, Russian, Finnish, Italian, Slovak and Polish translators of Hungarian literature. As often as not, there is at least one outstandingly talented or ambitious young translator at these workshops, who will later apply to return to Balatonfüred, and work on a project of his/her own.

The Hungarian Translators' House is a member of RECIT (Réseau Européen des Centres Internationaux de Traducteurs littéraires), and of the Halma network of translators' houses, which organises intercultural exchanges for authors and translators. The first and foremost aim of the House, however, is to promote the translation of Hungarian literature, both contemporary and classical. Its most important ally in this is the Hungarian Book Foundation (operating under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Culture), which helps finance the translation of Hungarian works published abroad, and operates as an information centre for translators seeking publishers, and publishers looking for translators. ❧

László Márton

In Storytelling Mode: the Long and Short of it

Gergely Péterfy: *Bányató* (Pit Lake). Budapest: Árkád–Új Palatinus, 2004, 125 pp. • András Forgách: *Zehuze.* Budapest: Magvető, 2007, 640 pp. • Centauri: *Kék angyal* (Blue Angel). Budapest: Magvető, 2008, 338 pp.

During the Nineties plot regained importance in Hungarian fiction, and the extra energy it released then is still palpable in the more interesting works of contemporary writers. That is not meant to suggest that there has been a return to the older framework of small-scale realism or uncritical acceptance of reality's reference points. Currently, Hungarian fiction, whether shorter or full length, confronts its readers with the preconditions as well as the limits of storytelling; that confrontation in itself becomes an important formative aspect of the plot. That certainly holds true for all of the three works discussed here, though all three are very different in terms of how one would classify their specific form and their character.

Gergely Péterfy, the author of the novel *Pit Lake,* is one of the middle generation who has shown major potential. *Pit Lake* is a sequence of self-contained short stories, which can be read both as a sociological description of a post-Communist Eastern European wasteland and a parable of the futility of the mundane affairs of this world. It proves that lightness of touch—Péterfy writes with assurance and facility—is not incompatible with an ability to carry substantial weight.

The story is set in the ruined landscape of an abandoned and flooded gravel pit. The area is not densely packed with the shanties and makeshift habitations typical of such places; it seems distinctly deserted, still conditions there sound rather poverty-stricken. The lake itself does not feature as a locale in the story so much as the place bordering it, but it features so dominantly in the speech and fantasies of all the characters that it inevitably becomes a symbol, an emblem of the hereafter. The pit lake has its guard, who if he had not appointed

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László Márton

is a novelist, playwright, translator and essayist. Among his works are a trilogy of historical novels set in 17th-century Hungary and a drama trilogy on 16th-century Transylvania. Two of his novels have been translated into German (Jacob Wunschwitz igaz története *and* Árnyas főutca) *and some of his short stories were written in German. Márton's translations into Hungarian include Goethe's* Faust, *as well as works by Luther, Novalis, Kleist and Walter Benjamin.*

himself to watch over its shores, would simply be another of the homeless who have lost their families. Again and again, he claims to see bathers who have drowned in the lake as they cling on to rusty mine equipment abandoned in what is now the bottom of the lake, along with the endless assortment of rubbish that people have dumped in the water—so he reckons, anyway. Péterfy makes the symbolic value invested in the lake spread to the locations of the action—a forest or the local boozer. As one of the figures puts it in a meditative moment:

> Fantasy is capable of grasping any spot and build any locality there. So we are free... to create for ourselves, with our own imagination, readily discernible locations that are suitable to become the settings for field exercises of our desires

A number of the characters are conducting field exercises of that nature. First and foremost among them is Anti ('Tony') Ragyás, who in an earlier life used to roam an underground maze of cellars, finding a thought in each and every recess; given that there are no cellars around the pit lake, now he looks for animal bones in the nearby forest. "I go from tree to tree," he says, "like a drunk between chairs... Now the trees are the cellars; every tree is a thought. I lean on the trees, feel them, and know which thought."

Wicked Vera, who appears in another episode, is engaged in something similar with foreign words and phrases that she passionately commits to memory, whether they make sense or not (this is a locality in which words can also be refuse and, equally, a feature of the terrain); then there is the guard's next-door neighbour, the rabbit breeder Kővári ('Stonecastle'), whose one obsession is to stay at home and so he projects his alienation from himself onto his rabbits. The guard does his field exercises to the audiocassette tapes discarded in large amounts around here, or rather to the noises they produce when played on a tape recorder (this episode features in the excerpt published here on pp. 3–14). But one can also regard as a regular exercise the guard's commentary on those who venture to take a swim in the lake:

> Children that learn to swim are learning the art of drowning, a very complicated and deferred form of drowning. Some engage in it at a fairly advanced level, competing at it, others are quicker in getting to the deferred drowning. Some of them win those competitions and are fêted, the losers slink away with long faces.

Through exercises of this kind, this post-Communist rubbish tip acquires the features of a Baroque cabinet of curiosities, displaying in a totally new perspective the topos of "reading the world" that stretches back to Antiquity. The rubbish is arranged into taxonomic registers by the protagonists of the various episodes. One such register is Anti Ragyás's collection of animal bones:

> Those bones were the haberdashery, so to say, the odds and ends of Anti's show-room... Needles, badges, ribbons, broaches and bows. Tiny, virtually unnoticed, but indispensable items of décor for the larger items like the shoulder-blades of deer or the hip-bones of wild-boars.

Or elsewhere, again Anti: "He wore a roe-deer rib on each shoulder like the insignia of military rank."

The tale, or plot—at least as this is normally understood—might be described as a loosely linked string of anecdotes. A grotesque parade of sad human beings with quaintly picturesque

attributes drift into the narrator's purview; something happens to them, or nearly happens, before they drift away. (Stonecastle's rabbits escape; Ervin, the travelling landscape painter, leaves his work in the safekeeping of Wicked Vera, who sells her body rather than the paintings; Kálmán, weedy and skinny, brings Katie Vadász fishing rods as gifts when he wants to court her, and then is so bowled over by his own boldness that he gets drunk instead of courting her; and so on.)

The literary devices that Péterfy reaches for, the way in which he makes the ground he covers both unusual and symbolic, do not allow the anecdotes to get stuck in the affability that has made much of the huge fund of Hungarian fiction so depressingly provincial. *Pit Lake* falls within a Hungarian version of magic realism that we are already familiar with from the work of Ádám Bodor, László Darvasi and János Háy (the latter two near contemporaries of Péterfy's). There is no lack of marvellous elements that shine out of the exhausted landscape (a gold ring that dropped out of the knickers of the woman who runs the pub, which—the text suggests—may have been hatched in her dreams; or the guard being beaten up by two young men who could make pebbles talk when they were kids and had the ability to make time stand still). All the same, the chief source for the imagination here is the formation of symbols; the magic transformation of the banal, in a trice, into something quite special.

Born in 1952, András Forgách's literary talents are multi-faceted. He became best known initially as a dramaturge and playwright, more recently his virtues as an essayist and translator have become obvious. He is a highly regarded stage director and his graphic work is regularly featured in literary journals. He first showed his talents as a novelist with his 1999 book *Aki nincs*—probably best rendered in English as *(The One) Who Isn't*—which is a novel in the disguise of strings of Zen Buddhist parables interspersed with a chain of shorter and longer texts with a possibly autobiographical reference. *Zehuze*, his second novel, shows, both in its parts as in its entirety, long years of careful, concentrated work and, in my view, is one of the major accomplishments in contemporary Hungarian fiction. (See an excerpt from the novel on pp. 33–38 of this issue.)

Zehuze is a blend of epistolary novel and family saga in the form of an endless interior monologue. The entire work is made up by the texts of letters sent by a Hungarian-born woman who now lives in Israel (she settled in Palestine after the First World War) to her daughter, who now lives in Budapest (born in Palestine she returned to Hungary after the Second World War), from the date of the latter's return in 1947 until the mother's death in 1976. That immediately gives us two authors for the monumental flood of words: one is András Forgách, who writes the novel, and the other is the mother, whom Forgách's fiction poses as being the writer of the letters. (The mother holds the floor uninterruptedly, from start to finish, the daughter's replies are not recorded though their content, as well as their punctuality or lack of it in arriving, is implied in what the mother writes.) That duality would give rise to tension in the text had Forgách restricted himself to imitating the letter form, with all its formalities (date, greetings, parting words etc.), because the swirling density of what, from the mother's viewpoint, is the stuff of life: how she perceives important public events, the smaller events of family

life, and so forth. The novelist surveys from a distance, as epic narrative requires. The mother does not discriminate, for her everything is of equal importance; thus she mentions a grandson's catching a cold alongside Nikita Khrushchev's (as things turned out) fateful address to the Twentieth Party Congress of the Soviet Communist Party in January 1956, and the contortions into which this forces the Israeli CP (both the mother and her husband are members), a concert she goes to, and mundane household chores. That might sound like a recipe for confusion, but the reader very quickly notices that Forgách—unlike his heroine—is very shrewd about what he chooses to present and has paid minute attention to the composition of his narrative. This gives a very distinct musical rhythm to the avalanche of words, and what at close quarters may look confusing turns out, from a broader perspective, to be the plenitude and richness of life itself.

Quite aside from that, the mass of letters that make up the novel is far from regular. For a start, by dropping the opening and closing formalities, Forgách fuses them into a near monolithic block, so that the reader, at every step, is right there, inside whatever happens to be the time of the letter, and this automatically leaves the impression of being inside an endless stream of consciousness. Secondly, the monologue itself is composed of strikingly lengthy paratactic units, without conjunctions: just as people gabble on for minutes on end, seemingly without drawing breath or without a change in volume. Thirdly, Forgách employs a consistent collage technique, chopping and changing subjects (or rather: making his mouthpiece change subjects) within any given passage while simultaneously leaving very clear references to mark the passing of time. Thus, the beginning of a sentence may talk about events happening in the spring, whereas by the middle of the same sentence the mother is complaining of a summer heat wave. These accelerations of time within the sentence are variable, but on the whole they have a steady dynamic. The text always shows in the margin the year in question, with the new year always succeeding the old in the middle of a sentence. The rhythmic deployment of the various strands of the narration, whether main or subsidiary, whether constantly or only intermittently recurrent, adds another layer to this collage.

The family saga aspect of the novels can be roughly summed up as follows. As already indicated, the letter writer, the Mother, and her husband, who is usually referred to as 'Daddy' or 'your Dad', are died-in-the-wool Communists and have accordingly raised their daughter, who marries a journalist by the name of Róbert ('Robby') Rozsda, likewise a Palestinian settler and die-hard Communist. The couple returns to Hungary with the aim of helping to build socialism. Thus, the novel differs from most works featuring Jewish subjects in post-war Budapest in presenting characters who are *not* Holocaust survivors; indeed, who cannot comprehend the trauma that survivors have had to undergo. True, the young couple's life is hard, and they are often dependent on the regular parcels that the mother posts to Hungary as it darkens in the Stalinist-Rákosi years (one of the frequently recurring subjects is what the mother has put in the post, as well as what reaches the intended destination, and what does not). Over the next eight years a total of four children are born, with their upbringing constituting one of the important secondary threads in the fabric

of the book. Robby's career takes a turn for the better and he is sent to London as correspondent for a daily newspaper, but then he is unexpectedly recalled. Back in Budapest, he carries on working as a journalist, but symptoms of a personality disorder start to present themselves, leading to a breakdown and eventual admission to a psychiatric hospital. Robby's wife, the daughter to whom most of the letters are addressed, has been unable to study at medical school on account of the children and is working as a nurse. She is now obliged to become the sole provider for the family, bearing a huge burden and eventually finding her own health gradually deteriorating. The four children, in their own different ways, flee from an unbearable family life just as soon as possible. In parallel there are the events occurring in the outside world, some well known, and the reader becomes privy to how the various members of this extended family (being neither pig-headed nor unprincipled) become disillusioned with their various long-cherished ideals, thus the ability of socialism to reform itself, the solidarity of Israeli and Arab left-wingers and the attainability of family harmony. The mother and literary-minded 'Daddy' grow increasingly isolated; to start with, just from Israeli non-Communists, but finally, due to their own growing misgivings, from their former comrades. In the end, by the Seventies, the mother's sentences are becoming increasingly ragged and short as her breathing becomes perceptibly more difficult. The very last sentence—"It is midnight"—signals equally interruption and closure.

In a short review like this it is difficult to do full justice to the riches of the motifs, or to the varied patterns from which the fabric of the story is woven, just as I have been able to no more than hint at the string of striking narrative dilemmas that Forgách's novel poses and answers. One thing, though, that should be touched on is the language in which *Zehuze* is couched. Forgách reaches for a time-honoured and reliable literary convention by letting his narrator's own words stand for her, since that language tells us a great deal about the mother, even when she is not saying much about herself. The writer of the letters had Hungarian as her mother tongue, but she was uprooted from a Hungarian-speaking environment when still a young woman. She is intelligent, has sound powers of judgement, and is fairly cultured in her own unsystematic way, but she clearly lacks an intellectual's sense of vocation; she is, after all, a housewife. She uses Hungarian to communicate with her husband and her nearest and dearest, and Hebrew to deal with the business of daily life, but most of her reading is in English. This results in an idiosyncratic style of Hungarian that is spiked (sometimes almost pizza-like) with foreign words and turns of phrase, making it both highly expressive and vigorous—a language that, if only because of the letter-writing context in which it is used, has an immediacy very close to that of the spoken word, yet confronts us as a structured text, and one with peculiarities of spelling, grammar and typography.

Just as an aside, *Zehuze,* the title of the book, is a Hebrew word, meaning roughly—as the dust jacket informs us—"that's how it is, like it or lump it, *c'est la vie*". Understanding only its meaning makes a commonplace of this odd-sounding word, with its ring of a magic spell. But is it really so banal as all that if a reader, in progressing through the book, comes to love perhaps not so much what is, but the fabric into which it has been transformed?

The debut volume of the author concealed behind the pseudonym Centauri was a 2007 collection of short stories, *Pátosz a káoszban* (Pathos in Chaos). That was followed by a similar collection entitled *Kék angyal* (Blue Angel). No more is known about the author's person in 2009 than that s/he was born in 1970, making this a rare case in Hungarian literary circles where the identity of a writer attracts rather more attention than it deserves and affects how books are read. For my part, I am pretty sure that this is not another example of the literary game in which an already well-known author reaches for a pseudonym in order to be able to try out a change in stylistic register without being burdened by the literary role and persona that s/he has fostered to date (think of Péter Esterházy's 'Lili Csokonai' or Lajos Parti Nagy's 'Jolán Sárbogárdi', both nominal authoresses of memorable works), or when a writer, not content with the fiction he has spun in a work, feels the need to construct a fictive author as well, complete with detailed biography and character sketch (by far the best example and still potent in its influence today, is 'Psyché', the creation of the poet Sándor Weöres).

Centauri is no less of a real existing individual for the fact that s/he chooses not to be known under her/his ordinary, everyday name, and that the face of that individual is invisible. If that person were to walk past me in the street, I would certainly not recognise him (or her) for Centauri, but I can instantly identify a piece of writing by Centauri on the basis of certain utterly distinctive stylistic marks. Centauri has the sort of talent that needs to devote a considerable part of what are clearly huge creative energies to curbing itself. Thus, it is evident that the visual and linguistic imagination frequently runs counter to the dictates of a composition, giving the text the feel, at times, of being overwrought or overcrowded, though equally it serves up some appealing surprises. Both of the Centauri volumes are quite varied in respect of the form, subject matter and register of the individual pieces, but nevertheless a distinctly homogeneous and striking literary stance runs through the resulting kaleidoscope.

Among the 15 stories that make up *Blue Angel* are the title story, a spiritual vision which is also a barely disguised profession of literary vocation; a horror story that draws on the Gothic novel ("Marsh Anthropoid"); a historical, or pseudo-historical parable on the subversive power of saintly simple-mindedness ("Well Under the Sun"); a frivolous legend in which the homage to Flaubert is designed both to uncover and accentuate a dialogue conducted with Maupassant's style of writing ("Flaubert and Fashion"); a grotesque adventure story that evokes the Arctic settings of stories by Edgar Allen Poe and Christoph Ransmayr, to say nothing of Jack London ("Floating Island"); an analytical-metaphorical parable that describes the narrator's own body as an outside world to be navigated by the consciousness ("Dissection Room"); and an exotic topography with a situation report by the author's generation ("The Bromine Explosion"). A reader gets the impression that each time Centauri sits down to compose a new piece the writer's whole world has to be recreated all over again, from the very beginning. On that account, a sort of hard to handle ungainliness can be sensed even in the shortest piece, which at best can be identified as strength of the literary persona.

Rather than the activist heroism that might be presumed to be at the centre of Centauri's approach and inspiration, however, there lies a sort of metaphysical angst, which on more than a few occasions tips towards fantastic demonism. Most of the pieces have a first-person singular narrator, though as to precisely where the line is to be drawn between the self's body and mind, by an eerie distortion of the time-space continuum, is left unknowable to that narrator; the more creative the fantasy, the more the inner balance is under threat. Another way of saying that is that with Centauri the inspiring idea becomes eerie and threatening (and also the foremost source of promise). The way that the protagonist of the story "Blue Angel" in his darkened consciousness functioning as space "stepped out from the pitch blackness like an unexpected contrast from the gloom of inaction" might also be read as an ars poetica. The first-person narrator of "Morgen and Norman" (see pp. 18–27 of this issue), some way into the story, in his solitude is visited by "appalling temptations; plans, brainwaves, tormenting urges...":

> flame-red figures sitting on the trees, on the furniture, the walls... they said not a word, just swarmed across the room, the yard, the tree branches; their tiny legs dangled from the loose gutter, lolled about in clumps on the terrace; there were places where they were scattered casually in a row on the lawn, like a necklace string of inwardly glowing rubies, popping up now here, now there from a molehill or from behind a tree trunk; they teemed like ants in nooks and crannies, and hardly any larger, whereas in another place, in the gateway, would stand a lofty figure, over sixty feet high, with shorter ones seated on his shoulders, and on them in turn, pocket demons of some sort! And ever more of them were pouring and climbing out from behind the lapels, the belt, the mouth, the nose, every one of them most agreeable, attractive and good-looking.

Once the reader knows what the outcome is one can well believe that the monstrosities were "attractive and good-looking", at least compared with what the narrator, shorn of solitude and apparitions, endures besides the dreadful physical torments undergone by his half-brother Norman.

That would all be terribly depressing if the gloominess of the world that emerges was not leavened by at least three factors. The first is the brilliance and strength of the imagination that is constantly at work, as well as the fact that however hazardous his creative imagination with its apparitions is, the moment it achieves artistic shape it ceases to be a temptation. The second is the idiom: Centauri draws on the most diverse elements of the language (perhaps most conspicuously when it comes to choosing personal names) for purposes of diminishing and comic distancing. Third and last: although there is not a drop of sentimentality in Centauri's writings, in the way characters are moved around the labyrinth or vastness of space, anyone who is a good judge of character will notice unmistakable (albeit carefully concealed) signs of love and affection. ❧

Gábor Gyáni

The Hungarian Tradition of Resistance—and 1956

In Memoriam László Péter (1929–2008)

László Péter and Martyn Rady, eds., *Resistance, Rebellion and Revolution in Hungary and Central Europe: Commemorating 1956.* London: Hungarian Cultural Centre—School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College, 2008, 361 pp.

The question of who is to have access to which of the state-security and secret-police documents of the Communist era has time and again given rise to considerable controversy in Hungary. What has triggered the latest flare-up of interest is a Special Commission report published last October: after spending a year examining documents previously inaccessible to researchers, the writers of the report recommended that they be made public without exception.

Few people know that the first such "examination" was conducted in late October of 1956 by László Péter, a Hungarian-born historian who passed away in his London home in June 2008. He, of course, had had only a few days to peruse these documents. It was on October 30 that the Revolutionary Student Committee of the University entrusted him—and a handful of other young historians—with the task of sifting through the papers in the headquarters of the Hungarian Secret Service. Péter was on the job until November 4, the day on which Russian tanks returned to Budapest.

He first gave an account of what he had seen in June 1957, when, as a Hungarian refugee studying at Oxford, he was interviewed for a Columbia University oral history project. It would be another fifty years before the edited and corrected English translation of the taped interview would appear in print, as one of the chapters in the book discussed here. It contains the papers presented at an impressive conference held at the London School of Slavonic and East European Studies in September 2006, to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the '56 revolution. The moving spirit behind the SSEES conference was László Péter, who, not content with the kind of

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scholarly reminiscing that was the typical fare of conferences of this kind, decided to make the School's commemoration of '56 an opportunity for scholars to ponder the meaning of the term "revolution", and its applicability to '56. As he writes in the Introduction to the volume:

> Resistance to established political authority, rebellion and revolution are common terms that are all too frequently taken for granted. There is, however, no public or scholarly consensus about which events qualify as rebellion, revolt, uprising or revolution. [...] The uses of the word revolution appear to justify my contention that the term is unsuited to analysis. (p. XIII)

By way of substantiating his argument, Péter surveys the social upheavals of the past and the terms used to describe them, and concludes that political convulsions can be described from a variety of legitimate pespectives.

> It follows that any definition of revolution is bound to be informed by a set of judgements about the value of those events and not by reference to any analytical construction that can, or indeed is meant to, meet with common agreement. Any definition of the term is therefore bound to be a self-conscious, deliberate stipulation rather than merely the application of common usages of the word. (p. XIX)

For Péter, then, to call the events of 1956 a "revolution" is to make a value judgement (witness the Communist insistence that '56 was a "counter-revolution"), and the word itself is not an analytical term.

This radically normative interpretation of the word "revolution" essentially begs the question of its "applicability"—and not just to 1956. The mainstream approach, however, is to use both terms in their semantic sense. Indeed, some historians have contended that strictly speaking, the concept of "revolution", as scholars understand it to describe 1789 or 1917, is not applicable to 1956. It is more appropriate, maintains Péter Kende, reviving Raymond Aron's old definition, to speak of 1956 as an anti-totalitarian *bouleversement* (disorder, upheaval).[1] I, on the other hand, have argued that

> The notion of "revolutio" works better to describe the analytical meaning of the Hungarian anti-Soviet and anti-Communist disturbance. The reason has been that the main thrust of the Hungarian situation in 1956 was similar to the seventeenth-century English and the eighteenth-century American "revolutions": to return to a point of departure by regaining some of the formerly lost social and political liberties.[2]

Péter's approach to 1956 at the SSEES Conference was to ask the thirty-two (chiefly Hungarian and British) participants to start with clarifying the following: What exactly does the word "revolution" mean as it applies to early modern Europe? What word(s) would appropriately describe the contemporary instances of national resistance to central authority in Hungary? Were the social upheavals and uprisings that shook Europe in the mid-19th and early 20th century instances of resistance, rebellion or revolution? And finally, what of the

1 ■ Péter Kende, *Eltékozolt forradalom?* [A Squandered Revolution?] Budapest: Új Mandátum Kiadó, 2006. pp. 98–119.
2 ■ Gábor Gyáni, "Revolution, Uprising, Civil War: the Conceptual Dilemmas of 1956." *European Review of History–Revue européenne d'histoire,* vol. 15, no. 5, October 2008, p. 519.

anti-Stalinist revolts? It is only after these issues had been addressed that the conference went on to deal with 1956 (seven of the studies in the volume), and its consequences and memory (nine further studies). Before we examine these more thoroughly, however, let us return for a moment to László Péter and his search of the Secret Service archives in 1956.

Péter was not the first to have had the opportunity to inspect the secret documents of a Communist state. The first such occasion, presumably, was in 1941, when the city of Smolensk came under German occupation, and the victors took possession of all the city's documents. At the end of the war, the collection was removed to the West, but it was not until 1958 that information gleaned from the so-called "Smolensk archives" was published in book form.[3] Hannah Arendt made use of the documents in the second edition of *The Origins of Totalitarianism,* in the preface to Part Three of the book, which dealt with the Soviet variant of the phenomenon.[4]

Naturally, the five days Péter was able to spend wandering among the Secret Service documents housed in the Gresham Palace and the building of the Interior Ministry next to it, allowed for no in-depth study of any of the papers there. To boot, the Communist state as a social and political system was not among his interests as a historian. His principal scholarly interests were 19th-century liberalism (in Hungary and in the rest of Europe) and the development of systems of law. These would become the leitmotifs of his subsequent scholarly career.

The historian

Péter was born in 1929, the son of a middle-class white-collar worker. He studied history and archival studies at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Budapest (named after Péter Pázmány when he started his studies in 1947, and after Loránd Eötvös by the time he got his diploma in 1951). After graduating, he worked as a county archivist for two years, and then got a teaching post in Budapest. His main intellectual interest already at the time was the history of political institutions, the history of ideas, and principally, the development of the Hungarian state in the 19th century.

He fled Hungary in late November of 1956, and was a graduate student at Nuffield College, Oxford by early 1957. The professors who most formed his thinking here were the philosopher A. J. Ayer and the social and political theorist John Plamenatz. From them, Péter learned the extraordinary significance of discourse for the development of political ideas, practice and institutions, and came to share their scepticism about modern nationalist ideologies. Accordingly, he was always highly critical of the programmes and practices of the 19th-century Hungarian nationalists: of 1848-49, no less than of the anti-imperialism of the decades of Dualism. He was just as critical of the nationalism of the Horthy era and of the manipulative nationalism of the Rákosi years. Péter was convinced that a historian had to eschew nationalism to be able to write history that was independent and critical in spirit.[5]

3 ■ Merle Fainsod, *Smolensk under Soviet Rule.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1958.
4 ■ Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism.* San Diego: Harcourt, Brace and Jovanovich, 1973. pp. xxv–xxvi.
5 ■ László Péter, "The National Community and its Past. Reflections on the History of Transylvania." *The New Hungarian Quarterly,* No. 125 (1992).

Péter joined the teaching staff of the School of Slavonic and East European Studies of London University in 1963, acquiring a Ph.D. degree in 1965 only, and remained there for the rest of his academic life. Appointed Professor of Hungarian History in 1992, he retired in 1994. Throughout his years at the SSEES, Péter worked incessantly to revive contacts between British and Hungarian historians, suspended in the wake of the Second World War. His efforts began to bear fruit in the latter part of the 1960s, and, by the 1980s, there were regular exchanges between British and Hungarian scholars.

The history of law and constitutional history were the great passions of Péter's life as an academic. Not the development of legal systems as such, but the social and political history of their development, the real aim being to shed light on the conventions, theories and ideals behind the formation of political concepts, political decisions and the institutions of the state.

Very early on in his career, Péter became convinced that what had transpired in Hungary from the 1830s on was not *"embourgeoisement"* or "the capitalist transformation" of society, but rather the transplanting and naturalisation of a Western—indeed, English—ideal: civil society. What the reformers of the Age of Reform wanted, he believed, was to replace an essentially medieval legal system based on a hierarchy of particular rights with rule of the law and full equality before the law.

Hungary's modern political institutions, Péter maintained, rest on the country's permanent constitutional traditions, even if latter-day interpretations of these constitutional traditions suggest a discontinuity. The details of this theory were elucidated in Péter's only book-length writing.[6]

The gist of his argument is that Hungary's "ancient constitution"—which was bipolar in that in respect of rights and duties, it was based on mutually agreed conventions *(tractatus)* between the crown and the nation—underwent no significant modification with the 1867 constitutional settlement, the Compromise, which established the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. What 1867 instituted in Hungary, he contended, was not representative parliamentary democracy, but simply a new variant of *dietalis tractatus,* a system which salvaged and poured into the new skins of modern parliamentarism the old wines of *iura reservata* (the rights reserved to the monarch) and *iura communicata* (the rights constitutionally vested in the nation). Constitutionally speaking, therefore, the Dual Monarchy was not a federation of two sovereign states, but the union, within one monarchy, of two separate countries. The problem was, Péter tells us, that subsequent to 1867, the Hungarian political elite chose to ignore this "fact", and declared that Hungary, being a sovereign nation-state, was not bound by the *tractatus,* the agreed conventions. The chief bone of contention was the matter of the joint army. The disagreement grew so acrimonious that on the eve of the First World War, even Hungarian politicians loyal to the Habsburgs denied that imperial ties bound Hungary to the Austrian Crown Lands.

The constitutional construct outlined above resulted in a precarious balance of

6 ■ László Péter, "Verfassungsentwicklung in Ungarn". In Helmut Rumpler–Peter Urbanitsch, eds., *Die Habsburgermonarchie, 1848–1918.* 7. Band. Wien, 2000, pp. 239–540.

power between crown and the Hungarian nation. It was a situation which led to excessive power for the crown and the government, and to what Péter calls the "autocratic theory of law". This autocratic tradition was, as he sees it, one of the salient features of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: it was specific to Eastern Europe, and something that perhaps did not cause, but certainly facilitated the victory of communism in the region in the wake of the Second World War.[7]

Péter's vision of Eastern Europe, thus, follows directly from his interpretation of Dualism and its constitutional history.[8] What made Eastern Europe "Eastern Europe", he maintained, was not the unquestionable fact of its economic and social backwardness, but the old, historical constitutionalism that continued to live on within the framework of modern parliamentary government. This was the immanent "necessary condition", the *sine qua non,* of the region's post-1945 bolshevisation.

Which brings us back to the young historian trying to find his bearings, in late fall of 1956, in the maze of offices and corridors in the building close to Gresham Palace, which then served as the Interior Ministry and the ÁVH (Secret Service) headquarters in Budapest.

Péter's "career in the Interior Ministry"

Péter himself gives this somewhat ironic title in the SSEES commemorative volume of 2008 to the interview recounting his search of the ÁVH offices in 1956. For several pages, he describes the complex layout of the building, and the way much of the magnificent palace, once a bank, had been renovated to make it suitable for such a specific purpose. Reading them, one can picture the earnest young Péter speaking in 1957, trying to give his interviewer as accurate an idea of the premises as possible.

He is no less careful when it comes to describing the papers he found: it was, after all, the first time an outsider had had a chance to peruse these reports since the Communist secret service started their post-war operations in Hungary. Looking through the material found in the building, it became clear to Péter that "the work of the ÁVH was a comprehensive reflection of the social, economic and political life of the country". (p. 327) The Secret Service were interested in every aspect of every citizen's life, and tried to extend their operations (or at least their vigilance) to cover every detail. From this mass of material (much of it filed in basement vaults, some in office filing cabinets, and some strewn in man-high heaps in the basement), Péter selected at random, and tried to get an in-depth picture not just of particular cases, but also of ÁVH procedure. What emerged was that, in respect of its organisational methods, the ÁVH followed the logic of central planning, complete with progress reports, plan-fulfilment reports and "project" evaluations by both the operatives and their superiors. Long-term and short-term plans were drawn up for detecting the domestic and foreign enemies of the régime, organisations as well as individuals, and

7 ■ László Péter, "'East of the Elbe': The Communist Takeover and the Past". In Robert B. Pynsent, ed., *The Phoney Peace. Power and Culture in Central Europe 1945–49.* London: School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London, 2000, pp. 17–38.

8 ■ László Péter, "Central Europe and its Reading into the Past". *European Review of History–Revue européenne d'histoire,* vol. 6. no. 1 (1999), pp. 101–111.

their prosecution (liquidation) was also centrally planned. It was clear from the documents that ÁVH operatives were expected to fulfil these plans, i.e., bring in their quota of "subversive elements", in the same way as a riveter was expected to assemble his quota of machine parts. Given the sanctions that attended the non-fulfilment of plans at that time, it is easy to see why the Secret Service needed to posit the notion of "an ever-growing number of class enemies": the unceasing fight against this phantom was one of the most ubiquitous features of day-to-day life under Rákosi.

Péter draws several conclusions from the "negligible fraction"—as he put it—of the written material that he had time to read. Though the tone of the documents was generally more realistic than most of what appeared in print at that time, there were, he found, considerable differences in the competence of the operatives at the various levels of the ÁVH hierarchy (e. g. factual and intelligently-written reports at the top, and appallingly stupid and muddled writing at the lower levels). Furthermore, there seemed to have been no coordination or information exchange between the various departments. As for the ÁVH's organisational methods, they showed considerable naiveté, and its adoption of the central planning model as its modus operandi bore witness to a certain slave mentality.

Among the papers Péter found time to read was a report on the surveillance (between March and August 1956) of some leading members of the three major parties of the coalition years (1945–1949), who were meeting and discussing ways out of the obvious bankruptcy of the Rákosi government. The document named among the critics—read: class enemies—of the régime a former Smallholder politician, István Dobi, who, in 1956, was the President of the Hungarian People's Republic! Other documents contained some rather naive plans for infiltrating Hungarian émigré circles, particularly Radio Free Europe. Péter also found reports on how informers were "recruited" and debriefed, issues that still preoccupy people today. Research since then[9] has confirmed Péter's findings that it took a whole network of informers ("voluntary" and "forced") to keep up the ÁVH's dreaded activities. The Communist terror apparatus, thus, owed its enormous power to intimidate to Hungarian society itself, that small, but by no means negligible segment of society which served it.

For an archivist used to written documents, it came as a surprise to Péter that a significant percent of the ÁVH's documentation was in the form of tape recordings. He did not then know how to handle tape recorders, and as it turned out, did not have time enough to learn. Fortunately, typed transcripts had been made of some of the tapes, among them the taped conversations that had taken place on the first days of June, 1947, between Rákosi and Ferenc Gordon, Hungarian Ambassador to Bern at that time. The subject discussed was how to persuade Prime Minister Ferenc Nagy, on holiday in Switzerland since mid-May, 1947, not to return to Hungary, i. e., to resign.[10] From the appearance of the transcript, it was clear

9 ■ See e. g. János M. Rainer, *Jelentések hálójában. Antall József és az állambiztonság emberei 1957–1989* [Caught in a Net of Reports. József Antall and the Political Police, 1957–1989]. Budapest: Institute for the History of the 1956 Hungarian Revolution, 2008. pp. 70–78.

10 ■ Cf. István Vida, *A Független Kisgazda Párt politikája 1944–1947* [The Politics of the Smallholders' Party 1944–1947]. Budapest: Akadémiai, 1976. pp. 292–293.

that it had been recently made. From this, Péter concluded that the Secret Service were getting ready to stage a Rákosi trial, and were collecting incriminating material going back nine years from their own archives.

What led to 1956?

Not surprisingly, the authoritative finding in connection with 1956 is that "there was no active, organized resistance preparing for the Hungarian Revolution. On the whole, the day-to-day resisters were more interested in surviving the difficulties than in working to overturn the régime."[11] There is no question, however, that there were sporadic instances of resistance, as well as latent, intermittent "sabotage": this latter form of opposition was the most important from the point of view of making life more bearable and strengthening people's morale.[12] For all that, premeditated and active resistance to the Rákosi régime was practically non-existent, and certainly did not lay the groundwork for 1956.

What, then, was the uncanny power that broke the spell of dictatorship in Hungary in October 1956, and mobilised all of society against the totalitarian state? The answer lies in the historical antecedents of *national* uprising and *social* revolution: we need to study the *Hungarian tradition of resistance* if we are to clarify how, in the absence of overt resistance in the Rákosi era, those few glorious days of 1956 could come about at all.

The SSEES conference papers published in 2008 are a good place to start, specifically László Péter's study on the tradition of resistance in Hungary *(ius resistendi),* and the three studies in the volume following it, each of them discussing a different uprising in Hungary from the beginning of the seventeenth to the end of the eighteenth century.[13] What general conclusions can we draw on the strength of these analyses?

The series of violent upheavals (uprisings, revolutions)—aimed at achieving the sovereignty of the first estate, and then of the nation—shows that there was a constant potential for revolt in Hungary from the 17th century on. The succession of events on each occasion shows that these upheavals had two coequal goals: to regain the nation's independence, and to forcibly change the political and social order. The Rákóczi war of independence (1703–11) was, perhaps, something of an exception, though even Francis II Rákóczi was willing to try social reform in an attempt to broaden the base of his support: he extended the heyducks' privileges to other segments of society so that they, too, would have a stake in his victory. The implementation of this ordinance, however, was half-hearted, at best.[14]

It was in 1848–49 that the cause of national sovereignty in the modern sense was first tied to that of (legislated) economic and social modernisation. Though the Pest revolutionaries of March 15, 1848 did not call for separation from

11 ■ János M. Rainer, "Violence and Resistance in Hungary before 1956". Op. cit. p. 197.
12 ■ Gábor Bátonyi, "The Hungarian Opposition and Resistance to Stalinism in the Early 1950s". In László Péter–Martyn Rady, op. cit. pp. 166–167.
13 ■ László Péter, "*Ius resistendi* in Hungary"; Martyn Rady, "Bocskai, Rebellion and Resistance in Early Modern Hungary"; István M. Szijártó, "The Rákóczi Revolt as a Successful Rebellion"; Orsolya Szakály, "Rebellion or Revolution? The Case of the Hungarian 'Jacobins'". Op. cit. pp. 41–84.
14 ■ Béla Köpeczi–Ágnes R. Várkonyi, *II. Rákóczi Ferenc.* Budapest: Gondolat, 1976, pp. 255–262.

the Habsburg Empire, i.e. for full national sovereignty, in time Hungary did break with the Empire: what was meant to be the lawful voicing of legitimate demands[15] ended up as a war of independence. In 1918, when, in the wake of the lost war, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy disintegrated and Hungary became an independent nation-state, the need for social and political change was again on the agenda. The urgent necessity of protecting the country's new borders, which were already being hotly contested by the successor states, likewise accelerated the rise of the Hungarian Soviet Republic in early 1919, and a whole series of radical social and economic measures would be introduced by the Béla Kun régime, that short-lived import from Soviet Russia. The next revolutionary turning-point was 1956: in this case, the issue of national independence unquestionably went hand in hand with the issues of social and political reform.

The tradition of revolutions notwithstanding, there is in Hungary also an alternative historical tradition. It is the political culture and collective memory of compromise: the penchant of the Hungarian political elite of whatever time to come to terms with the victors, to incline to opt for some kind of settlement. This tradition, too, dates back to the Rákóczi war of independence, more exactly, the Peace of Szatmár which put an end to it. The deal that the Hungarian nobility made with the Habsburgs in 1711 had two important consequences: it guaranteed the aristocracy and the county nobility a wide range of exclusive privileges within the Empire (their exemption from taxation being the salient one), and recognised their exclusive right to exercise power at the local (county) level. Another consequence of Hungary's willing integration into the Habsburg Empire by the terms of the Peace of Szatmár was a certain degree of long-term economic and social development. For this reason, concludes Szijártó, the Rákóczi revolt "might be justly regarded as not so much an unsuccessful war of independence [...] as a successful rebellion".[16]

Hungary's surrender at Világos in 1849 would have similar results. Franz Joseph's absolutism left no doubt that the rebellious Hungarian estates—who, incidentally, had lost their privileged status in 1848—were no longer the masters in their own house. Nevertheless, Hungary was gradually transformed into a capitalist market economy.[17] It was the first time—though by no means the last—that the political interest of the nation and its social and economic progress were not parallel developments. The constitutional settlement reached in 1867, a realistic compromise that was seen as the "culmination" of 1848, has been the chief reference point of this alternative historical tradition. Its advocates have argued that the "mistaken" excesses of the revolution were corrected by the subsequent settlement, which opened the door to constitutional government and a

15 ■ Cf. István Deák, *The Lawful Revolution: Louis Kossuth and the Hungarians, 1848–1849.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1979, p. 99.

16 ■ István M. Szijártó, op. cit. p. 76.

17 ■ György Kövér, "A reformkortól az I. világháborúig" [From the Reform Era till WW I]. In János Honvári, ed., *Magyarország gazdaságtörténete a honfoglalástól a 20. század közepéig* [Hungary's Economic History from the Conquest to the mid-20th Century]. Budapest: Aula, 1997. pp. 245–303.

limited sovereignty, as well as industrialisation and, based on it, a budding market economy.

One can hardly miss the analogies between 1848 and 1956,[18] or more exactly, between the Compromise and the "consolidation" under Kádár. The analogy, of course, springs from the collective memory of "revolution vs. compromise", which is specific to Hungarian political culture. When a—national—uprising is also a revolt against imperial rule (which, except for 1918, was always the case) it is important to be able to identify the potential source of social resistance, to see *which elements* of Hungarian society were able to turn against their imperial masters from time to time, and, though defeated, succeed in forcing the empire to come to a compromise.

This brings us to the matter of the local elite which, the various forms of imperial subordination notwithstanding, always enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy, freedom of thought and political latitude. Had it not, it would never have had the potential to turn against a superior (imperial) force, neither in theory, nor in practice. Of all the countries of Central Europe whose continuous statehood dates back to the medieval dynastic state, Hungary, though it has had one imperial ruler after another, is practically the only one which was never short of this potential for resistance.

Throughout the decades that the Habsburg Monarchy and then its reformed variant, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, constituted the imperial framework of the Hungarian state, it was the middle nobility, the *bene possessionati*—a class sharply distinct from the largely court-based aristocracy—which comprised the potential social basis of resistance. Without the middle nobility, there would have been no reform initiatives at the Diets of 1825 and after, and no revolution of 1848. Even the Compromise of 1867 could never have come about without the constant influence of Hungary's provincial ruling elite—and, of course, the support of the "national" aristocracy. Indeed, the existence of such an elite is, perhaps, the only guarantee that the pressing need for national independence and social reform will explode in revolution, *and* will eventually reach a resolution through compromise.

Potential for resistance is generated at times and in places where there are present the social preconditions of autonomy and freedom of thought. For resorting to force of any kind against the overwhelming power of the state (never mind empire) involves enormous risks, and so presupposes a high degree of autonomy. Repeated (partial) success at resistance, however, can result in cumulative experiences (traditions) which will inspire the social groups involved to look for, and make use of, similar opportunities.

So what does all this tell us about Hungary's 1956? It is something of a commonplace that there would have been no October 1956 without 1953: without the well-documented (though temporary) break with Stalinism wrought by Imre Nagy's first premiership. It was the events of 1953 which resulted in a fatal internal rift within the ranks of the Communist elite, a circumstance which would weigh heavily, come 1956. To quote one of the first scholars to argue this thesis:

18 ■ This is what János M. Bak said at the conference: "Forward into the Past: Some Thoughts on Historical References in the 1956 Hungarian Revolution". Op. cit. pp. 215–219.

> The present work has grown out of a study on the internal rift within the Communist Party of Hungary. This rift, so long hidden from the outside world but closely interwoven with the popular opposition against a Soviet-dominated regime, provided material for a continued study of conflicts in the body politic of Communist Hungary, conflicts which eventually led to the Revolution of 1956.[19]

But the split within the ostensibly unified and conspicuously narrow circle comprising the upper echelons of the Hungarian Communist Party was not due to just the domestic repercussions of the Soviet attempts to come up with a tenable post-Stalinist system. The Hungarian Communist leadership itself had done its utmost to undermine its own ranks. The terror under Rákosi had not spared the Communist elite. The Rajk trial marked the beginning of the divisive political course whose unintended consequence would be the internal rift within the Party. Middle- and upper-level Party functionaries who had managed to survive the sentences passed on them at show trials were, as often as not, conclusively alienated from their old comrades. In this sense, the road to 1956 is the story of the Communist cadres (many of them disillusioned intellectuals) who rallied around Imre Nagy in 1953, intermeshed with the story of the Communists who had survived persecution. With Rákosi's return to power, the latter's fate became for the former the handwriting on the wall. Subsequently branded as "revisionists", these cadres and those who shared their views[20] joined with informal authorities (writers, artists, scholars) and certain revered cultural icons (e.g. Gyula Illyés, László Németh and Zoltán Kodály) to form a relatively autonomous "local elite" capable of paving the inner way to 1956.

Speaking of the social history of the road to 1956, however, we cannot ignore the resistance potential of the working class. Called, with some exaggeration, "the revolution of the Workers' Councils"[21], 1956 stands out for the extent to which it mobilised the industrial working class. It is one of the paradoxes of 1956 that the revolt against Communist rule involved the very social groups in whose name the Party exercised the "dictatorship of the proletariat". The term was, for the most part, an empty slogan, but it did have some basis in fact: the Communist system had provided the lower classes with social mobility on a massive scale when it "promoted" them to urban workers or schooled Party cadres.[22]

The strict internal hierarchy within the ranks of the industrial working class also contributed to their political activation, since it invested their own elite, the skilled workers, with a degree of autonomy. Though the "new phase" introduced by Imre Nagy did not quite

19 ■ Ferenc A. Váli, *Rift and Revolt in Hungary. Nationalism versus Communism.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961. ix.

20 ■ On these "revisionists", see Paul Hollander, "Crossing the 'Moral Threshold': the Rejection of Communist Systems in Hungary and Eastern Europe". Op. cit. pp. 201–208.

21 ■ This is partly Arendt's, mostly Lomax's view. Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution.* Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973; Bill Lomax, *Hungary 1956.* London: Allison and Busby, 1976.

22 ■ Tibor Valuch, "Changes in the Structure and Lifestyle of Hungarian Society in the Second Half of the 20th Century". In Gábor Gyáni–György Kövér–Tibor Valuch, *Social History of Hungary from the Reform Era to the End of the Twentieth Century.* New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. pp. 572–602.

meet the financial and political expectations of the nation's skilled workers, it did have the result of giving them a greater say on the job. The attempts at "restoration" that followed the fall of Imre Nagy brought home to them how much they stood to lose if Rákosi's power continued to grow unchecked. By the mid-1950s, the growing number of skilled workers in heavy industry (many of them young, first-generation workers) were not nearly as easy to intimidate as their older mates had been. The suppression of the attempts at reform introduced by Imre Nagy once Rákosi was again at the helm alienated practically the entire working class, particularly the skilled elite: they were no longer as easy for the state to terrorise as in the early '50s.[23]

How far the "workers' party" had parted company with the working class, its much-touted social base, becomes clear if we look at the social composition of the Party membership. Even the doctored membership data show that in 1956, workers comprised hardly over a third of the members of the Hungarian Communist Party, as compared to the roughly fifty percent in 1950.[24]

What triggered 1956 in Hungary, therefore, was not terror, poverty and despair: these plagued all the countries of the Soviet zone equally. More important from the point of view of the road to revolution was Hungary's traditional revolutionary potential, and, of course, the severe post-1955 disillusionment with the régime. There is yet another, psychological, factor which probably came into play: identity crisis and a frustrated self-image as a nation. For Hungary's history in the first half of the 20th century was one of a series of wrongs and wrongdoings: the lost war and its consequence, Trianon; the Horthy era, with its crying social inequalities, racial discrimination which made Hungary a party to the crime of the Holocaust, and war losses which cost the nation a million lives; the second lost war, the shame of "collective crime", and that endorsement of Trianon, the 1947 Treaty of Paris; and finally, Communist rule and terror, and with it, subjection again to the dictates of an empire, the Soviet Union.

All this in itself would have been enough to revive and strengthen the spirit of resistance. For the trauma of wrongs suffered by individuals (sometimes at each other's hands) and the communal trauma of the loss of liberty engender not just apathy and a sense of impotence. The feeling that "we have nothing to lose" after all we have misdone and lost can be a powerful incentive to great deeds. And nowhere in the Soviet bloc was this feeling nearly as strong as in Hungary. The heroism that was the hallmark of the '56 revolution was due, in part, to this typically Hungarian psychosis, when the nation "chose" the well-rehearsed revolutionary alternative, and found its salvation in 1956.

It is this unique formula for revolution that is illuminated by the published version of the SSEES conference organized in 2006 by László Péter and Martyn Rady. ❧

23 ■ Mark Pittaway, "The Reproduction of Hierarchy: Skill, Working-class Culture and the State in Early Socialist Hungary". *Journal of Modern History,* vol. 74. no. 4. (2002), pp. 737–769.
24 ■ Tibor Hajdu, "Hogyan alakult át a munkáspárt a bürokrácia pártjává? 1948–1956" [How Was the Workers' Party Transformed into the Party of Bureaucracy? 1948–1956]. *Történelmi Szemle,* vol. XLVIII, no. 3–4 (2006). p. 331.

Zsófia Szilágyi

Labours Lost?

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák: *Megértés, fordítás, kánon* (Reception, Translation, Literary Canon). Bratislava: Kalligram, 2008, 448 pp.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák has brought a lifetime of experience as researcher and educator to bear in this volume of essays treating all the complementary aspects of the complex issue of translation. As a comparatist teaching Hungarian and world literature to university students in Hungary and the United States, he has regularly come up against the problem of the quality of the available translations of Hungarian literature and the Hungarian translations of world literature, as well as the question of their usability in education. The essays in this volume, most of which have already appeared in other publications, are rooted in his personal findings, which reduce to a basic dilemma: translation, as Szegedy-Maszák sees it, is both a necessity and an impossibility. In substantiating his thesis, the author examines the matter of translation from both "directions". In several studies, he discusses the question of how translated (and re-translated) works have shaped the Hungarian literary canon; and conversely, raises the issue of why it is that "Hungarian literature has had so little impact on the as yet amorphous notion of world literature". Why is it that one is hard put to name even one "must read" Hungarian literary work, while languages with considerably fewer native speakers than Hungarian (e.g. the Scandinavian languages) have produced works that are read the world over (the dramas of Henrik Ibsen, for example, or the *Kalevala* of the Finns).

It would, of course, take more than fine translators and fine translations for a work to find its way into what Harold Bloom famously called the Western Canon. For one thing, translation, Szegedy-Maszák tells us, is closely related to transcription and interpretation. In other words, we might add, translation takes place not just between languages, but also when a work of literature is "reworded" in a study or book review: in short, the "mediators"—historians of literature, teachers and literary critics—all play a part in the shaping of literary

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canons. What is more, a literary canon is also closely related to publishing. It is all too easy to generate a vicious circle, where publishers reprint over and over the books that schools have prescribed as required reading, while teachers assign only the easily-available books, i.e., those currently in print.

Continuing Szegedy-Maszák's train of thought, we might take time to reflect on the role played by publishers, academics and critics in Hungary's receptivity to translated literature. The author himself notes the anomaly of the Hungarian practice of having different university departments teach Hungarian literature and "foreign-language" literatures. We might consider it a telling consequence of this segregation that though Thomas Pynchon has long been regarded as one of the most significant authors alive today, it was only in late January of 2009 that the Hungarian translation of his *Gravity's Rainbow* was published, thirty-five years after it first appeared, and as the sole one of his works to become available to Hungarian readers. In the same vein, one cannot help but notice how very few reviews appear today of books published outside Hungary, and even those mostly only after the book has appeared in Hungarian translation.

Not that Szegedy-Maszák ignores the purely linguistic aspects. He deals in some detail with how polysemy "disappears in the translation", as they say, specifically when Hungarian works are translated to some other language. Polysemy gets lost not just in the case of poetry—whose non-translatability is something of a commonplace—but of novels, too, starting already with the titles. Translation, however, goes beyond the matter of language: it is to be understood "very broadly, as intercultural exchange, a dialogue between cultures, the naturalisation of the foreign, as transculturation". Seen in this light, it will be clear why the English editions of Hungarian works (unlike their German translations) seldom cause much of a stir. Hungarian culture, as Szegedy-Maszák points out, has had much less contact with English culture than German; moreover, while English is radically different from Hungarian in respect of phonetic structure and syntax, many of the Hungarian words in use today entered the language as loan translations from German at the time of the early 19th-century movement of language reform.

Szegedy-Maszák's most important caveat to translators is to eschew too close a correspondence with the original language: the aim is that the work should not read like a translation. What one wants is to see, for instance, an English version of Kosztolányi's *Pacsirta* (*Skylark,* translated beautifully by George Szirtes) that is embedded in the *English* literary tradition. This being so, it will come as no surprise when Hungarian critics pass a different value judgement on an originally Hungarian work than critics abroad. Sándor Márai's *A gyertyák csonkig égnek (Embers)* is a case in point: few Hungarian critics consider it to be one of Márai's best works, and yet there can be no question of its huge international success. (Szegedy-Maszák does not deal with Márai at any length in the volume under review; his Márai biography is due to appear as one of the future volumes in this series of his collected works.)

Many Hungarian critics hold *Szindbád hazamegy* (Sinbad Goes Home) to be one of Márai's best; this short novel, however, stands little chance of ever becoming a part of the world literary canon, for

basically, it appears to be untranslatable. It is a novel that conjures up the person, the milieu and the style of the writer Gyula Krúdy, and, as such, well exemplifies both the notion that "to translate is to build bridges between distant cultures", and the fact that the question of intertextuality—the works of other writers and their milieu conjured up by a given text—is inseparable from the problem of translation, inseparable, at times, to the point of making translation quite impossible. Though Hungarian readers are able to identify the names, settings and references that appear in the text and subtext of this Márai work, readers from other cultures will not know what to make of these allusions to Krúdy and the Krúdyesque and all the complex connotations.

Then there is the dichotomy of the translatability of a work and its immanent value. No question about it, Hungarian readers of Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság* (translated by Tim Wilkinson as *Fatelessness*) were surprised when German publishers submitted the translated work for the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2002. It is safe to say that many people expected Péter Esterházy to be awarded the Prize. We must keep in mind, however, that "Though in retrospect *Bevezetés a szép- irodalomba* (Introduction to Literature) or *Harmonia Caelestis* (translated by Judith Sollosy under the title *Celestial Harmonies*) might turn out to be more significant works than *Fatelessness,* these books of Esterházy's are deeply rooted in Hungarian history, and so are less translatable than Kertész's novel, which has become part of the nascent international canon of Holocaust literature."

Ideally, a translator would need to have regard for intertextuality when making a translation. Failure to do so is to remove the work from its cultural and literary frame of reference, and to divest it of levels of meaning. And yet, a translator who takes intertextuality into account is, in fact, re-writing the work. There are very few examples of a translator having "changed" even the literary allusions. One person who did was the bilingual Vladimir Nabokov, who himself translated *Lolita* from English to Russian, and put Pushkin and Blok in place of Mérimée and Shakespeare in the Russian translation, and Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* in place of Coleridge.

For Szegedy-Maszák, Nabokov is significant not so much as the author of *Lolita,* as for being a bilingual author with a dual cultural identity. Nabokov and Samuel Beckett, whose work is treated in even greater detail, figure importantly in this volume not only because multilingualism is one of the salient issues of 20th-century literature (though not, alas, of Hungarian literature), but also because discussing them provides Szegedy-Maszák with an opportunity to address what seem to be personal dilemmas. Though the author (as he told Péter Szirák in a 1994 interview) generally refrains from making "personal confessions", he does not deny that "with hindsight, the personal involvement emerges quite clearly". The most interesting example of this is his book on Márai, which appeared in 1991 (and whose revised edition is due to appear soon). Speaking to Szirák of the Márai book, Szegedy-Maszák had this to say:

> My English friend, Richard Aczel, even noted that this book is really about me. At the time of writing it, I was faced with a choice: "Shall I live in Hungary, or the U.S.A?" It was the consequences of having

to make such a choice that I projected onto Márai's career. Reading his books, meeting the author personally, and then exchanging letters with him confirmed my impression that [the projection] was not unfounded."

The author's personal concerns are reflected in this volume as well. Is it possible to speak simultaneously to a Hungarian readership and to an international one? Is it at all possible to translate literary works, or do one's words have validity in another culture only if one is able to think in the—foreign—language of that culture? Szegedy-Maszák remains preoccupied with the authors, works and issues of Hungarian literature although he has had ample experience of the irrelevance abroad of these preoccupations:

> My own experience impels me to note that there is no real intercourse between Hungarian literature and world literature. That is why when I am asked what I'm working on, and I say it's a new history of Hungarian literature, my colleagues abroad mostly shake their heads, as if to say that I'm old enough to know better.

The most interesting thing about this volume is that we have a literary historian to guide us as we sift our way through the complex issues of translation. As it turns out, even the translation of literary periods is something of a problem. Today, when our universities use the categories of Western literary histories (classical modern, avant-garde, late modern, post-modern) even as they teach the periods of 20th-century Hungarian literature, it might be well to pause for a moment and give Szegedy-Maszák a hearing:

> I pose the question with some trepidation: Is it not a distortion to interpret Hungary's inter-war literature as modern literature when it was so decisively influenced by a longing for the restitution of pre-war Hungary? It was not just Márai, but Radnóti, too, who celebrated the re-annexation of every lost part of the country. Both of them were content to ignore the circumstances of the re-annexation.

Mihály Szegedy-Maszák's book was written primarily for a literate Hungarian readership, but non-Hungarians with an interest in Hungarian literature would also find it fascinating reading. ❧

Peter Sherwood

The Translator's Plight

Zsigmond Móricz: *Relations.* Translated by Bernard Adams, with an Introduction by George F. Cushing. Budapest: Corvina, 1997; second printing 2007, 262 pp.

Rokonok, one of the most important works of twentieth-century social (but not socialist!) realism by Zsigmond Móricz (1879–1942), is a grim but elegantly told tale of the little, decent man crushed between pork-barrel politics and family ties in a still largely feudal inter-war Hungary. The reissue a decade after its first publication of this translation by Bernard Adams is a reminder of its disconcerting congruences with the country's enduringly tribal culture in the post-Communist era but also, hopefully, an indication of some continuing demand for the work in English. Therefore, instead of offering a summary of the plot and sundry comments of a journalistic kind, I will take this opportunity to take a step back to consider the nature as well as the context of the translation itself.

There is, in the first place, the question of the actual text that is being translated. In none of the cases that follow—a selection based on my own reviews—is there any indication of which text the English translation is based on: it is assumed by everyone involved that it is obvious. This is not so. For example, the first, pre-war translation of Dezső Kosztolányi's *Édes Anna,* by Adam de Hegedus, omitted the final chapter; the second, by George Szirtes, published in 1991, is based on the version censored by the post-war Communist regime. The English version of György Konrád's *Kerti mulatság (A Feast in the Garden)* contains only about two-thirds of the original text. While poetry arguably deserves separate consideration (though see below), it might be mentioned that, for example, the Kenneth McRobbie–Ilona Duczynska translations of several of Ferenc Juhász's poems leave out many lines of the originals. In the case of the book under review, one-sixth of Chapter 1 (beginning "It was like a dream..." on page 16 and ending at "'No... Doe,' he said, laughing" on page 18) has no equivalent in the version of *Rokonok* in my possession (Európa Könyvkiadó, 2006; according to the verso of the title-page, this text is based on the 1975 edition published by Szépirodalmi Könyvkiadó). Perhaps a Móricz scholar can shed light on the dis-

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crepancy; but until it is clear what we are talking about, criticism can hardly begin.

Once it can be established what exactly is being translated, we may look at the even thornier question of the translation process. Thornier, because the line between the responsibility of the translator and of the editor/publisher is never easy to draw—but the real problem is that the question of responsibility is hardly ever raised. There is even an overlap with the issue in the previous paragraph: a recent review in the *Times Literary Supplement* of George Szirtes's version of Sándor Márai's *(A) zendülők* wondered about the presence/ absence of the definite article in the title in the 'original', which may seem to be a small matter but has, on reflection, considerable import. (And although I can see both sides of the question, I do wonder if here "Relatives" might not have been a better choice for the title of a book concerned with endemic, nepotistic corruption; relationships between "relations" are not exclusively of the genealogical kind it expressly addresses.) Mainly, however, the problems involve the skills of the translator and editorial conventions in the countries of publication. As far as the latter are concerned, it is important to bear in mind that we are not talking about just Britain and the USA: many translations of Hungarian literature into English are, as in this case, published in Hungary, and I know of at least one recent work that—an interesting sign of globalisation—came out in the Czech Republic. As the reviewer mentioned above, Mihály Szegedy-Maszák, has repeatedly pointed out, in spite of a few outstanding exceptions, it has to be said that because many English-language versions of Hungarian works of literature are poor, they make assessment of Hungarian literature in the English-speaking world both quirky and inadequate, if not actually impossible. I need hardly expatiate on the importance of this to a culture, such as that of the Hungarian-speaking world, whose identity and values continue in the twenty-first century to be intimately (and explicitly) bound up with its language and literature.

It is, however, important to remind ourselves that there is a vast range of problems involved at this level, from virtually intractable (and thus often defining) cultural differences to highly tractable misprints, via intervening layers of lexis, syntax and style, each of varying tractability. Though misguided in his insistence that the author is the ultimate authority on translations of his work, Milan Kundera, in his preface to the English translation of his novel *The Joke,* surely hits the nail on the head with respect to the intensity of engagement required of the translator in our time:

> Ever since *Madame Bovary,* the art of the novel has been considered equal to the art of poetry, and the novelist (any novelist worthy of the name) endows every word of his prose with the uniqueness of the word in a poem.

Consequently, if we are to go beyond the ad hoc subjectivities of *de gustibus non est disputandum,* a holistic approach to the criticism of translation, too, is indispensable, perhaps especially when dealing with works widely acknowledged as masterpieces and/or enjoying considerable popular acclaim in their particular traditions. Those interested in an attempt at such a holistic approach may like to look at my essay on George Szirtes's translation of Kosztolányi's *Anna Édes,*[1] or that on

1 ■ *Translation Review* (University of Dallas at Texas), 95 (1998), pp. 34–38.

Carol Brown Janeway's version of the German version [!] of Márai's *A gyertyák csonkig égnek/Embers*;[2] here limitations of time and space mean that I can offer only a sample of what is involved: a list of the most straightforward notes I made on Chapter 1 only of the book under review (excluding the additional material noted above, for which I do not have a Hungarian version, and also leaving for another occasion ways of dealing with such realia as modes of address and so forth). The page numbers refer to the English text.

p. 16

a népekkel/his people. *Recte:* his staff

!*Kábultan*/astounded. *Recte:* dazed, fuddled

Talán már tíz is van: has been omitted in the English

p. 19

unpurturbed. *Recte:* unperturbed

Egy egész új asszonyt kapott/He'd found a whole new woman. *Recte:* He was seeing a completely new woman

!*rendre szoktatta*/called him to order. *Recte:* she had him house-trained

p. 20

elszólta magát/said the wrong thing. *Recte:* let the cat out of the bag

!*el van adósodva*/owed them an awful lot. *Recte:* he was up to his ears in debt

!*nyers ember*/dry manner. *Recte:* he was uncouth

megfordult/turned. *Recte:* did a complete about-turn

p. 21

paragraph beginning "Lina shuddered". This has been misunderstood, partly through mistaking what "is" ("also") refers to. *Recte:* ...because even if he had always been a secret, unseen enemy of theirs [...] they were only the more aware that they had to be careful not to cross his path

észrevétlenül/imperceptibly. *Recte:* unobtrusively

harmadiknak/for third. Better: as the third name

!*hallatlan*/silent (misunderstood—it is an adverb and not related to the absence of hearing). Recte: incredibly

erőszakos/powerful. *Recte:* aggressive, violent

p. 22

Nem őrültél meg?/Did you go mad? *Recte:* Did you completely lose your marbles?

chuck... down the drain/*elzabál. Recte:* guzzle down

!*Fúj*/That's nothing special. *Recte:* Disgusting! (twice)

birka/lamb. More likely: mutton

p. 23

Mint egy vizsgáló bíró/As an examining magistrate. *Recte:* this is probably an aside: Kopjáss is muttering (to himself/the reader) that his wife is cross-examining him like an 'examining magistrate', not saying that he is such a person himself

Megsimogatta a homlokát/She wiped her forehead. *Recte:* She drew her hand across her brow

p. 24

!*végképp*/at last. *Recte:* [now] thoroughly [aroused]

!!*Eltörött benne a józanság*/Pista felt a surge of well-being. *Recte* the opposite: approx. he lost his senses (or better judgment) for a moment

varázshatás/magical influence. *Recte:* approx. bound him in a spell, exercised such fascination

minden igényét kielégíti/fulfilled all his requirements. *Recte:* satisfied all his needs

Hol találkozhattak?/Where could they have met? *Recte:* Where would they have met? (Or: How could they...)

zavaros/anxiety. *Recte:* confusion

2 ■ *Hungarológiai Évkönyv* (Pécs), IX. (2008), pp. 124–134.

p. 25

elvesztette a fejét/losing his head over. *Recte:* letting his hair down because of

!*lelkiállapot*/[extreme] spiritual state. Recte: state of mind

!!*fantázia*/fantasy. *Recte:* mind, imagination

Paragraph beginning "Now again he was suffering". This has been misunderstood. The reference is to his wife. The second sentence has been turned into its opposite, and *egyszerű* 'simple' has been rendered !'furtive'

!*cigányozás zavarta meg a gondolatait*/ gypsying... put thoughts off the rails/ . *Recte:* this mention of Gypsies had thrown her into confusion

szerény/humble. *Recte* here: undemanding, unassuming, modest in her needs

kimennénk/went out there. *Recte:* went to his village

!*dünnyög*/chuckle. *Recte:* mumble, grumble

Az is kezdi már/it's happening again. *Recte:* There he goes—he is another one, just like the others

p. 26

kinő a keze alól/too big for her to hold. *Recte:* become too much of a handful, grown too big for her to handle

nem jött semmi mellékes/to spare. *Recte:* there was never anything extra

biztonságérzet/feeling of certainty. *Recte:* sense of security

!!*ujjongott*/pointed. *Recte:* exultantly

!!*Csupa olyan ember*/There were those who. *Recte:* They were all

!!*Valamennyi levél*/Some of the letters. *Recte:* All the letters

szerény levelet/unobtrusive letter. *Recte:* innocuous-looking letter

p. 27

hiszen neki most mindenre hatalma lesz/for he'd got a lot of influence. *Recte:* because he'd now have boundless influence

!!*tele van a rokonokkal*/his wife had a pack of relations. Misunderstood. *Recte:* his wife had had her fill of (HIS) relations, and he had put it like that for her benefit. But it warmed his heart that...

!!*Vajon melyik ruha ellen nem volna kifogása. Már tudniillik Linának, ha odaadná*/for by now she'd know if he gave him anything. Misunderstood. *Recte:* Which item of clothing would she not mind him sending (or: giving away), he wondered

gyors információja van/Lajos bácsi finds out quickly (sic). *Recte:* he's got his ears to the ground, eh?

Meglehetős nagy pocskolást csinált/He splashed as much as possible (sic) and spent a long, relaxing time shaving. *Recte:* He made a show of splashing about noisily and had a long, leisurely shave

!!*ócska, de vadászruhának éppen az az értéke*/my hunting jacket's a bit old, but that's what I need it for. *Recte:* [it's] a bit scruffy, but then that's how a hunting jacket should be

Linácska nem szól/Linácska did not speak. *Recte:* Silence from Linácska

p. 28

it hung on him/NOT 'on him', simply 'in the attic'

alázatosan/humbly. *Recte here*: meekly

"Never mind, my lad..." Misunderstood: this is addressed to his son, not to the man waiting

kegyelettel őrzök/out of sentiment. Better: for sentimental reasons

At the levels of syntax/style and 'culture', which happen not to be easily exemplifiable from the first chapter, I shall have to limit myself to a couple of perhaps random, but certainly symptomatic points, taken from Chapter 11.

The question of how to render Hungarian parataxis, highly typical of this text and of Móricz's style, and indeed of Hungarian rustic-literary prose in general, is a complex one. Is it possible to give e.g.

"Lina sírt, megtörülte a szemét" as "Lina wept, wiped her eyes" (p. 91 of the translation)? The answer to this question should really be based on analyses of comparative literary corpora that have not, to my knowledge, been undertaken so far, but my guess is that the English of this sentence is ungrammatical in a way that the original Hungarian is not, and that therefore such a rendering falsifies the translation.

As for 'culture', I will focus on but a single sentence in this chapter: when (still on p. 91) Lina refers to Pista's 'relations' as *"poloskafaj"*. The translation seems fine at first glance, skilful even:

> *Most már magából fog élősködni az egész poloskafaj?*/Are you going to let the whole pack of blood-suckers feed off you?

On the other hand, the failure to reflect the fact that the Hungarian compound noun at the heart of the sentence includes as its second element the diagnostic 1930s word *"faj"* ("race"; the text first appeared in book form the year before Hitler came to power) means that, crucially, there is no link to the title and nepotistic essence of the work, severing a delicate but vital thread in its fabric. Lina is not being *merely* angry and nasty; she is connecting directly with the *Zeitgeist* of inter-war Hungary. So this, too, requires more thought and something closer to the Hungarian, involving "parasites", "bedbugs" and "race" (or perhaps "breed"), would almost certainly be needed to ensure that this key sentence resonates fully, throughout the text, picking up (inter alia) the couple of (admittedly fairly mild) anti-Semitic references to be found in the original.

In conclusion, I would stress that in spite of the foregoing there is a great deal to admire in this translation, and it is not my intention in any way to belittle the extraordinary labour, mainly but by no means solely of love, that such work necessarily involves. But the important work of translators of Hungarian literature into the most widely-used language of the contemporary world should be supported much more broadly, pro-actively and conscientiously by a range of expert advisors, editors and publishers if the aim is to offer the English-speaking world even an approximate indication of the value and importance attached by its native speakers to (especially classic) works of Hungarian literature. ❧

Tamás Koltai

Operatic Thrills

Ludwig van Beethoven: *Fidelio* • Georges Bizet: *CarmenCET*

In 2007 Ádám Fischer as music director and Balázs Kovalik as artistic director were appointed to head the Hungarian State Opera, which had been reeling from crisis to crisis since the Eighties. Kovalik is certainly no newcomer to the Opera House: his debut, a controversial *Bluebeard's Castle* by Béla Bartók (2001) may have met with mixed reactions, but the 2008 production of Richard Strauss's *Elektra,* with Agnes Baltsa and Nadine Secunde in the leading roles, was a resounding success (*HQ* 190). The symbolic, at times almost surrealistic, visual world in which Kovalik set Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin,* the next production he brought to this stage, had a more equivocal reception by the public, although its qualities were almost unanimously applauded by the critics. In the meantime, Fischer, a highly acclaimed operatic conductor worldwide, started work in Budapest, but at another venue, the acoustically excellent concert hall of the Budapest Palace of Arts. He started on a project of putting on Wagner's entire operatic oeuvre in semi-staged productions with *Parsifal* in 2006, and with huge success. "Wagner Days" is now an annual event in Budapest, with the first two parts of the *Ring* tetralogy (*Rheingold* and *Die Walküre*), put on in June 2007, while during the 2008 June season the entire *Ring* cycle was performed twice over, both times on four successive days, that is to say, without rest days, making for a rare experience indeed. Singers with Bayreuth experience, spectacular abstract settings evoked through multimedia by stage director Hartmut Schörghofer, and, not least, Fischer's superlative musical contribution aroused enormous interest. (He too has had previous engagements as conductor at Bayreuth.)

Operatic life in Budapest indeed fizzed, with more major events happening during a single year than had (not counting the occasional special event) over a decade and more in the past. Thus we came to the first jointly planned 2008–2009 season of Fischer & Kovalik. Their first new production was Beethoven's *Fidelio,* which gave rise to a greater storm than any premiere has done

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in Hungary for many a year. The opening night alone provoked a very vocal protest aimed at the director, with appreciative applause from the majority of the audience at times being drowned out by the catcalls (or boos) of a minority. This is something that has largely only been encountered abroad, in Western Europe; it has been rarely experienced in Hungary, and even then in much milder form (one thinks of the far more timid demonstrations against Yuri Lyubimov's *Don Giovanni* in 1984, or Katharina Wagner's *Lohengrin* in 2004). The reaction spilled over into internet discussion forums, which in a matter of just a few months attracted several hundred comments. One critic went so far as to demand that Kovalik acknowledge the failure of his direction, others expressed considerably less patient, aggressive, not to say vulgar opinions. Critics were divided. Alongside a fair number of laudatory reviews, there were ill-tempered and disparaging ones, whose authors included a leading music critic.

So, what was it about the direction that could possibly have provoked this unusual antipathy (the musical achievement was widely praised)?

Before I attempt to answer that question, let me recount my own personal experience. At the opening night, I sat in Row 7 of the stalls, next to an American couple from Arizona in their thirties. They were positively enraptured by the magnificent opera house itself. They were also greatly taken with the performance. Were they not bothered by it being out of the ordinary, I asked. Not a bit, they said; in fact, they were glad as this was the first time they had been to the opera. You mean the first time in Budapest? No, the first time ever in their lives.

I have no trouble in imagining that couple as representing the most authentic audience for *Fidelio,* being quite innocent of any operatic conventions. They took their seats with open minds. They were unaware of the scholarly consensus that *Fidelio* presents a dramaturgically insoluble problem, with the intimate, familiar *Singspiel* style of the first act being irreconcilable with the heroic tone of the second. It may be that one simply has to forget the idea of being told some sort of realist story. *Fidelio* is not made modern by setting the action in a Nazi concentration camp or Abu Ghraib prison, but by our understanding the nature of the acceptance of self-sacrifice, belief and freedom, and in the way that these things are woven into the drama. Admittedly, one might grasp that even if one was confronted right at the start with a young girl in love who is playing the part of a young man, but in the shape of an elderly and buxom dramatic soprano who has been levered into a tight pair of trousers. After all, where would theatre be if audiences did not willingly allow themselves to be fooled? So we accept the convention that a Leonora, in fighting for the release of her husband, who is languishing in prison, is dressed up as a man and behaves like a man. Ultimately she will be victorious over tyranny and a woman's heart. But what if, for once, we were to get to the real nub, the director might well have thought, and grasp the ethos of self-sacrifice and desire for freedom that overarches whole eras and historical cataclysms? What the work originally spoke about, philosophically and spiritually, as distinct from everyday acts. In this production Christ's passion is emulated by Florestan's suffering. The story of the liberation of a prisoner, deprived of his freedom and condemned to death, becomes part of the redemption of

humanity, of all of us, while Leonora, the wife who wins his freedom, is raised to a symbol of the essence of femininity. A bit of empathy is all it takes to understand how various eras and historical symbols come to be intermingled on the stage; why machine-gun-toting commandos can cross Roman soldiers on the march; or why haloed saints pass among a procession of contemporary youngsters and grey-suited security men. Or why Rocco, unwilling to carry out the killing alone but willing to assist, should wash his hands like Pontius Pilate; or why the bread and water given to relieve his pangs is, in Florestan's eyes, the sacrament itself. Then again, why it should be that when Marzelline, the lovesick daughter of the prison guard, mentions the name Fidelio, and speaks about the heavy burden that (s)he is carrying, the latter's figure for her should take on the identity of Christ bearing the Cross. Even if we do not grasp such aspects quite so explicitly, we can at least accept that they form part of a symbolic system. For instance, that it is not Leonora who dresses in men's clothing as Fidelio, but the ideal of salvation that she represents appears in the form of her redeeming incarnation as Fidelio (or, indeed, Christ himself). It matters little whether this is meant to be reality or just a flight of fancy. This is theatre, where everything is just a game.

Such thinking is not unparalleled in the world of opera nowadays. Only a few months before *Fidelio* opened, the Bayreuth Festival mounted Stefan Herheim's production of Wagner's *Parsifal,* which presented another story of salvation in which Christ likewise figured as the model, if one may put it that way. The difference was that Herheim actually evokes his figure on stage, indeed replicates it, projecting him at one time onto the figure of the suffering Amfortas, at another onto that of the redeeming Parsifal or that of Kundry as she switches between extremes while awaiting redemption. On the Bayreuth stage, events in the century and a half of Germany's history were shown in pictures (and here one should bear in mind that this is a work with even less "action" than *Fidelio*)—in other words, far more tightly packed and with far greater liberties being taken in associating ideas than was the case in the Budapest *Fidelio*. Of course, it too had its critics, though curiously enough rather fewer than is usually the case at Bayreuth, but there was nothing like the furore that raged in Budapest.

Kovalik's theatre may be tightly packed with ideas, but his theatrical language is readily comprehensible. If Marzelline does not fall in love with a flesh-and-blood person but an ideal, then the real Leonora and the idealised Fidelio are two faces of one and the same individual—or in other words, two figures —and in the Budapest production they are, indeed, separated. The Fidelio who takes part in the action is silent—he is played by an actor—whereas Leonora is a heroine trapped in her own personality and lives out this self-imposed schizophrenia as an internal drama. On the stage she is driven into complete solitude, having her own domain, living an independent life throughout the opera, so one might say she experiences what takes place as a dream or vision (this has been a fairly common approach since Harry Kupfer's production of *The Flying Dutchman* some thirty years ago). The overall concept is an integral and self-consistent whole, with the various planes, however complex they may be, linked in a rigorous interpretation. Kovalik's interpretation is clear as crystal. The

spheres of existence consist of four levels of four narrow walkways (situated in front of an imaginary prison wall), with the lowest one belonging almost exclusively to Leonora throughout, while the mundane and the symbolic planes chop and change in logical fashion on the remaining three levels. Everything is symbolic, and nothing at all is natural, with the colours of red, white and green (the Hungarian national colours) being applied, according to level, to everything from utilitarian objects (e.g. Marzelline's very ordinary saucepan) to the stylised costumes worn by the characters. The chorus of prisoners and prison guards wear white overalls and while marching swap among themselves their red hoods and peaked caps, take the weapons from the other group, and then dispatch each other. Unravelling the allegory should not be too difficult for those Hungarians familiar with the lines by István Örkény that go: "For us this age is our begetter and destroyer. / We were sent on our way with the counsel / that we could be heroes and killers, / both at once, in one and the same person and place. / Each of us shifts this way or that accordingly."

The director places a big burden on the singers as, while being debarred from drawing on accustomed straightforward, realistic psychological devices, they must still create passionate and autonomous personalities. The final ensemble scene, before which the Leonora Overture No. 3 is played (a relic of Gustav Mahler's abbreviated tenancy as music director in Budapest in 1888–90), evokes the moment of liberation from servitude and dictatorship. An enthusiastically celebratory throng, waving little flags, pours across the different levels. It is a rainbow-hued spectacle of sheer joy and nostalgia that must have reminded more than a few in the audience of the heady days of Hungary's transition to democracy in 1989–90. In the seemingly unclouded social harmony reigning at that point in time it would have seemed unimaginable that less than twenty years later an opera production would be capable of stirring up not just controversy but such intolerant and hostile passions.

The new management team are looking at other ways of making fresh approaches. The Thália Theatre for a while has been providing an occasional stage for chamber opera. Bizet's *Carmen* has now been put on there in a scaled-down, highly truncated version lasting a bare hour and a half (a process for which the precedent was set by Peter Brook's production, as shown in his 1983 film of *The Tragedy of Carmen,* which used a small orchestra and dispensed with showy scenery, choruses and crowd scenes), Director Péter Telihay gave his own undertaking the title *CarmenCET,* the CET standing for Central European Time. To put it another way, this is a version that is self-avowedly adapted to our own times. The title role is thus presumably someone whom one should see in sociological terms as being from a multiply disadvantaged racial minority and who comes into conflict with the majority culture. In this case, however, the devices selected to express this idea are inappropriate. It is not enough to have the characters dress up in modern-day clothing, wearing jeans and carrying backpacks, or to choreograph the soldiers as they molest the young woman who is looking for her fiancé, if just about the only thing to distinguish this from a traditional production is that it drops ensemble scenes in favour of an unconnected series of arias and duets. If even the key *seguidilla* in which Carmen

seduces Don José with her singing is omitted, then the relationship between the characters cannot be established; indeed, the whole point of the story is lost. If the director truly thought that the characters of Bizet's opera, who stood out in their own day by their very ordinariness, could simply behave as contemporaries of a modern-day audience, then he should have concentrated on that. Instead the most he could muster were conventional gestures and operatic swagger with the orchestra placed on the stage, and scenery replaced by an arena reminiscent of a bull-fighting ring. This was not enough, though, to achieve the goal that had been set, for all we get is an opera about olden times shaken together with pseudo-modern mannerisms.

There were also some stirrings outside the metropolis as well. At the National Theatre in Szeged, in a co-production with the Mezzo TV channel, a first international operatic singing competition and festival were put on, which will henceforth be held annually. Though a singing competition, the competitors did not just pit singing skills against each other by performing single arias but were required to display the full range of their acting abilities in performances of entire operas. Each opera formed part of the regular programme of an opera house in five cities: New York, Gdańsk, Rennes, Bremen and Szeged. The applicants were screened for the main roles by passing several preliminary rounds so that several hundred singers were eventually whittled down to four finalists in each of the five productions. The productions in turn were brought to Szeged, during November 2008, to be performed in succession before an audience and jury, which included such luminaries as the Hungarian soprano Éva Marton and the Russian theatre director Anatoly Vasiliev. All five performances were transmitted live by Mezzo TV, which gave an opportunity for phone-in voting. The jury decided that the two winners were the American tenor Adam Diegel, singing the role of Maurizio in Francisco Cilea's *Adriana Lecouvreur* (Szeged National Theatre), and the Croat mezzo-soprano Janja Vuletić, singing the title role in Benjamin Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* (Baltic Opera, Gdańsk). Getting the chance to hear the superlative Britten piece, which was musically the strongest of the five operas, proved to be one of the great experiences of the competition, even if one has to concede that in terms of overall performance the prize would have to go to Dicapo Opera of New York's performance, under the direction of Róbert Alföldi, of Robert Ward's 1961 opera *The Crucible,* based on Arthur Miller's play. One hardly supposes that *The Rape of Lucretia,* being a modern opera (1946) of very special qualities, gets performed frequently enough anywhere, even in its home country, for one to get familiar with it and hence appreciate all that it offers. Thus, uneven though the standard of the festival may be, it has to be said unreservedly that it was well worth holding merely for the chance it gave us to make such discoveries. ❧

Discoveries and Disappointments

The 40th Hungarian Film Week
Kieron Corless in Conversation with Dávid Dercsényi

This year Hungarian Film Week celebrated its 40th anniversary with 18 feature films, 30 short films and 31 documentaries chosen to the competition. For you, it was a first. What were your impressions?

The scale was impressive. As far as I'm aware in Britain there's no equivalent of what is both a celebration and promotion of national cinema. I noticed there were lots of people from foreign festivals, so it was partly about promoting Hungarian cinema abroad.

There are prizes, so it is a competition, but it is also a show.

I didn't get the impression that it was very competitive. It seemed to be more about people getting other people to see their movies.

Were you aware of any thematic pre-occupations?

I was struck by how most of the films were about children and young people feeling lost, as if there is a lost or abandoned generation which lacks direction or a purpose in life. That came through quite strongly in seven or eight films. *The Seventh Circle* by Árpád Sopsits was impressive. It is about child suicide. It is quite shocking actually. It would be almost impossible to make a film like that in Britain now because there's a lot of child suicide, and I don't think that the director would be allowed to work with children in that way. The material is tough but it is dealt with subtly and convincingly. The performances are incredible and the children have been very well directed. You are never quite sure what's going on with the priest; you never know whether he has a dark side. And yet, aesthetically, it's quite conventional. This was an interesting combination. Sometimes it was like a television movie with a subject a TV movie would never deal with. It had ambiguity.

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Another film laden with ambiguity is Pinprick *by the American director Daniel Young, who works in Hungary.*

The movie is an exploration of a teenage girl's sexual awakening, and the director managed to create an engaging atmosphere. An English mother and daughter live alone—the father has left them. An escaped prisoner hides in the young girl's closet and the mum doesn't know about him. I wasn't sure about some of the performances, but Young created a sense of claustrophobia. You asked yourself: is this real or fantasy? For a while you assume the man is the teenage girl's projection and then you gradually realise that he's a real person, so there's this very slow shift. Another interesting aspect is that you are not really sure where you are. There's this Hungarian guy speaking English with two English women. But this is not England and there were no references to where the movie is set, which I assume was deliberate. The question burns: who is the intruder here? Who is the foreigner here? They kept the suspense going. The relationship between the mum and daughter, which was quite difficult and complex, was captured quite well, though I felt let down by the ending.

Paper Planes *by Simon Szabó was also about youth.*

Yes, though the material was quite thin. There might have been a good short film there, but it was stretched too far. It just didn't draw me in. The film was too undisciplined and amorphous.

What about György Pálfi's new film I'm Not Your Friend?

I was a bit disappointed after *Hukkle* and *Taxidermia,* which were aesthetically very interesting and worked for British audiences; they did well at international festivals, too. *I'm Not Your Friend* was more conventional. I was intrigued by the kids in the nursery in the beginning, and then when we moved to the adult movie. It was well directed, but I didn't feel the characters were very interesting—I heard that Pálfi's actors improvised a lot of this material, if not all of it, which may account for its feeling of self-indulgence and lack of rigour. And the thesis that "these men are all appalling and these women are suffering because of the men and they're going to get their revenge" was one-dimensional. The music was awful. In fact the choice of music in many Hungarian movies I've seen was dire. Hungarian filmmakers are capable of making good use of music in service of the narration. In a Béla Tarr movie often you'll have long, silent passages, and then all of a sudden there will be a piece of brilliantly chosen music. It is actually in the movie for a reason. But Pálfi's film resorted to some pretty banal musical effects. The whole thing was very contrived.

Lost Times *by Áron Mátyássy won the best film award. It is a story set on the Hungarian–Ukrainian border where an older brother who cares for a mentally handicapped teenage sister is involved in smuggling petrol.*

I didn't like it at all. Again the material was very clichéd. I felt I had seen all that before. It is difficult to do someone who is mentally retarded—it's very hard to think of a film that actually pulled that off in a credible way. The direction was flat and the material sensationalist and overdramatic. The rape of the retarded girl is a case in point. I would have been happier with something simpler—the relationship between the boy and the girl would have been sufficient.

1 *by Peter Sparrow, a young director, is based on a story by science fiction writer Stanisław Lem.*

This film didn't work for me. It is ambitious formally and thematically, and it has an interesing premise, but I didn't feel engaged. The narrative becomes opaque and the characters start to feel like caricatures quite early on—I lost interest pretty quickly. It seemed to lose its way, became too busy and cluttered, and the documentary elements didn't integrate well and broke the flow. The production design was impressive, but felt a bit too indebted to Jeunet. But I liked *Chameleon* by Krisztina Goda. This was a stylish, slick, enjoyable commercial film. It wouldn't surprise me at all if the English-language rights were sold in Hollywood, because it is a really strong premise, skilfully developed, with well-rounded, engaging characters. The protagonist is fascinatingly flawed (and the actor playing him is very good, reminiscent of a young William Hurt). I loved the pace and flow of it, the fluidity of the camerawork, its agile plotting, which is always at the service of convincing character development... I felt carried along by someone very confident who knew exactly what they were doing and where the film was going. Thematically, it has interesting things to say about loneliness, dependency, desire, greed. The twist at the end is unpredictable and works well. It is dark subject-matter, but handled lightly and nimbly.

Any surprises for you?

Juliette for me was the discovery of the festival, the movie of Ádám Szirtes. I had never heard of him before, but I will definitely look out for other of his films now. It is a minimalist experimental piece, just two actors mainly, a therapist (played by the director) and his patient. It is static, dialogue-driven, it all takes place on one set—at one point we see the crew, a nicely reflexive, Brechtian moment. The director questions the patient, flirts with her, they develop a relationship with a palpable erotic charge, and slowly layers are peeled off... What's great though is the way the film develops, with fresh and sometimes shocking revelations at every turn. None of which feel forced or gratuitous (the tone is in fact quite gentle and downbeat, not at all sensationalist), mainly thanks to the miraculous acting of Mercédesz Obádovics Érsek—she has incredible poise and presence, great charisma and subtlety. Szirtes plays clownishly, but that works as a perfect counterpoint to her more layered performance. It somehow manages to make madness seem understandable, even beautiful. What's even more surprising and refreshing about the film is how it turns, very subtly, into a reflection on perception, images, power relations, cinema itself. I am not sure how much of this was improvised, but if it was then it stands as a rebuke to the Pálfi film. This one isn't at all self-indulgent, but rigorous and intelligent. It looks very low-budget, but it is a model of how to turn those limitations to your advantage with thought and imagination.

Did any of the documentaries shown at the festival engage your attention?

I liked *Matuska* directed by Csongor Szász. It's about a terrorist, Szilveszter Matuska, who blasted the bridge in Biatorbágy in the 1930s. He disappeared after the Second World War and nobody knows what happened to him; whether he was killed by the Russians or the Germans, whether he died at all or took a new identity. What was interesting in this film were the many different voices, the different versions of his life and what happened to him. It just showed that history is never simple—it was a nice idea. The other documentaries were insular and difficult for a foreigner to follow. *Matuska* is very Hungarian, but it still spoke to me; it managed to make this person alive and make you curious about him. ❧

Erzsébet Bori

Hungarian Snapshots

Kristóf Kovács: *Full of Grease* (a.k.a. *Butcher's Glory*) • Eszter Hajdú: *The Fidesz Jew, the Mother with No Sense of Nation, and Mediation* • Bori Kriza: *Rocking the Nation*

Documentary films that depicted society were much touted as a genre in Hungary and other countries of the socialist bloc during the Seventies and Eighties. They found their calling—and their public—by contrasting real life with the declared goals and official ideology of the regime. Directly before and after the great changes of 1989–1990, another genre of documentary film, that of unearthing the true facts behind historical events, enjoyed brief days of glory; the presentation on the screen of subjects that had been taboo for more than forty years achieved sensational effects on audiences that few feature films succeed in doing.

When that wave passed, documentaries found themselves in a vacuum. The list of scandalous topics to be tackled had dwindled: no subject was sacrosanct, and it gradually became clear that their shocking content disguised shabby and old-fashioned deficiencies of presentation. In the meantime, there was the inevitable ageing of those who had been involved, and the drying up of the financial support system. The tiny budgets that were available were split between a host of film projects, and the short timescales given to tender for support did nothing to encourage carefully prepared, visually demanding, boldly experimental work.

More recently, the logjam seems to have been broken. In the wake of the struggles to assert its own interests, documentary-making has acquired more clout. Documentary festivals, like Dialektus and Verzió, have successfully put down roots and drummed up their own audiences. At festivals and competitions, jury panellists and viewers are finding that their viewpoints converge; the sort of films that win prizes also tending to find favour on the big screen with cinema audiences and with panels of student judges. Director Kristóf Kovács's *Full of Grease* shown as *Butcher's Glory* at Verzió and a surprise hit at the 2008 Hungarian Film Week, can boast of being one such success story.

The story unfolds in the tiny village of Vajszó in the Ormánság, a region at the very southern tip of Hungary. The main figure is a man called Lajos Balogh, who lives there in great penury, but despite a

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total lack of prospects keeps on hatching plans and pouring out ideas with unflagging enthusiasm. We're not talking about enormous dreams either: first he gets himself nominated as a candidate in the local elections so that the Roma inhabitants should also have a voice in the council. Far from being put off by failure in that, and learning of an international pig-slaughtering competition, he organises a team in order to make the tastes of his birthplace better known in the wider world. The film follows him as he puts together the Nimble Gang to represent the district and their preparations for the big contest.

Here it would help to make an aside. Films, both feature and documentary, tend to keep harping on about their chosen subject until they have done it to death. Not so many years ago, after the changes in Eastern Europe of the early Nineties, there was a boom in subjects for which a Gypsy slant could be found. This was when the West, not entirely of its own accord, discovered the Roma and swamped the world with feature films and festivals in which leading parts were taken by Gypsies dressed in flashy costume and ready to switch on instant revelry, for all the dire poverty in which most of them lived. Domestic Hungarian documentaries were no different, albeit here they opted for darker, more sombre colours as being more suitable both to their own traditions and to the grinding poverty of their subjects. Since then the Roma have gone out of fashion, and only the most committed of directors now concern themselves with them. Approaches have also changed fundamentally, with accusatory images of social exclusion and total deprivation being replaced by something that more closely corresponds to attempts at political integration. Gypsies have ceased to be being exotic creatures, arrivals from another planet, and are now portrayed in their many interactions with the majority society. *Full of Grease* is a good example. The Nimble Gang is of mixed ethnic composition and is seeking (and finding) common links with a wider community that is willing to provide both financial and moral support to the team as it prepares for the competition, an event that obviously offers viewers the chance to see both the gruesome and humorous sides of a traditional Hungarian pig-killing. Of this the filmmakers have taken full advantage, and as a result, *Full of Grease* is a documentary that is uplifting as well as being thoroughly entertaining.

At the Verzió 5 International Human Rights Documentary Film Festival in November 2008, there was one Hungarian film that aroused a lot of attention: *The Fidesz Jew, the Mother with No Sense of Nation, and Mediation*. In her provocatively entitled work, Eszter Hajdú tries to verify the widespread belief that Hungary's political divisions are also having a deleterious effect on private lives. It is left-wing publicists who are most prone to ring the alarm bells on this, charging the main opposition party (Fidesz—Hungarian Civic Union) with splitting the nation in two. There is also research that shows how damaging and counterproductive the constant electoral jockeying between the socialist-liberal and centre-right parties is, to say nothing of the irrational and emotionally overblown political hostility between them. The director took the question perfectly seriously and started to look for possible candidates to interview. What she found was that, although plenty of people were ready enough to give encouragement and

approval, nobody wanted to take a public stand. In the end, though, two "pairs" did step up to the mark. The married couple had allegedly split up because the wife was incapable of fully entering into the spirit of belonging to the Hungarian nation, while the other pair, a couple of old friends, had become estranged because one of them, despite being Jewish by background, was a politically active member of Fidesz. The two stories may appear credible enough in the light of a Hungarian viewer's personal experiences or convictions, but if one scratches the surface, one comes across a fair slice of cognitive dissonance and searching for excuses. In other words, in both relationships, even without the political dimension, there were plenty of signs of conflicts and mutual grievances that normally speaking would be expected to lead to a bust-up. Even so the film was not a futile undertaking: it makes viewers face up to a genuine problem, which is that even if the suggestion that political divisions destroy intimate relations is untrue, the general sense of unease and the climate of fear that feed such urban myths are very real.

Bori Kriza's first film, *Rocking the Nation* covers a Hungarian "national rock" band whose name translates as Romantic Violence and it created an even bigger stir. Radical "racial Magyar" youth, with which the country itself has had a fair time to enjoy the pleasure of gaining acquaintance, both inside and across Hungary's borders, introduced themselves to the world in the Autumn of 2006. What the world's TV audiences saw were cars burning around the Hungarian Television headquarters in Budapest as a mob laid it under siege. These were images of protest such as had not been seen since 1956. Hungary's extremists of the right combined the usual neo-Nazi ideological concoction of anti-Semitism, hatred of the Roma and general xenophobia with peculiarly heady home-brewed toxins to create a muddy potion that an outsider can make little or no sense of. This is a world in which, André Breton-style, the land of the Virgin Mary, the Holy Crown of St Stephen and the Sacred Heart of Jesus have an encounter on a post-mortem table with ancient shamanistic beliefs, runic script and linguistic affinity with the Huns (and/or Scythians and/or Sumerians). The delusion of recovering those parts of Greater Hungary lost by the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 co-exists with anti-European isolationism; purple-haze New Age symbols with the vandalism of the ultra-racist hooligan elements among the supporters of the Budapest football team, Ferencváros.

There is a propensity to call this extremist minority "radical", though not for a moment should anyone believe their thinking is in any way radical: the label is simply a euphemism, a synonym for violence. In truth, it is a rabble that has been holding Hungary's hard-won freedoms—the right of assembly and organisation and the right to free speech—hostage. The community at large seems to have no defence against groups like this. Perhaps because Hungary's political elite is too formalistic in its approach to the rule of law and to civil democracy. Perhaps also because the vast majority of the population, while rejecting violence, when it comes to the exclusion of Roma communities, xenophobia, sexism, a virulent hatred of all élites, and, not least, the idea that Hungarian history is nothing more than an unbroken chain of conspiracies against ordinary people, actually shares the extremists' points of view.

The fan base of such far-right rock groups may be a subculture similar to, and may have just the same right to a place in the sun as the fans of rap, techno, or devotees of computer games or members of embroidery circles. To make music in a rock band, wave two fingers in the air in a V sign, be among friends, down a beer or two, let off steam—that's no bad thing, and they have a right to it. The only question, though, is why they should feel it is absolutely necessary to do this while confronting others.

Director Bori Kriza and the large number of cinematographers whom she worked with did a thorough job. They followed Balázs Sziva's group and their die-hard fans far and wide, and over the long term; they hunted out the elderly godfather who first referred to what these rudimentary skinhead bands were playing as "national rock" (on the now defunct Pannon Radio); they listened to György Budaházy, the movement's barkeeper ideologue and its "National Leader" László Toroczkai. They also gave an unexpected chance for those who follow Romantic Violence in particular to express a wide range of mindsets and motives.

I have read more than once how lucky Kriza was that while she was shooting the film, shortly after the 2006 general election, the press were leaked comments that the newly re-elected prime minister, Ferenc Gyurcsány, had intended for private consumption within a narrow party circle. Several of those who took part in the film were among the crowd who gathered in front of Hungarian TV's headquarters in September and later went on to lay siege to it, some managing to acquire nationwide celebrity (or notoriety). It is clear, however, that the filmmaking crew worked very hard for their luck: they had spent more or less a whole year accompanying their starring characters from the lead singer's home to a succession of clubs, or appearances in the "Hungarian Island," an antithesis to Budapest's "Island Festival" (an event that every summer pulls in performers and audiences from around the world for a week-long festival of rock and jazz and other forms of popular music). They even followed Romantic Violence on their tour of Transylvania, in between taking in the band's triumphal way from the statue of the Turul Bird (a potent symbol for the far right) to protests about Trianon. In other words, they followed the trajectory taken by the radicalisation of the extreme right wing, from verbal to actual violence. And that is merely an abbreviated summary of the material that was collected. The approach they adopted is restrained and reserved: there were some who accused the team who made *Rocking the Nation* of failing to intervene, or leaving unchallenged things that those appearing in the film were shooting off at the mouth.

The film was shown at Verzió 4 in November 2007, where by chance it had a natural partner in the shape of *Young, Nazi and Proud,* a documentary about the youth wing of the British National Party made for UK Channel 4's *Dispatches* series (and first shown in November 2002) by David Modell, who did everything that some were expecting from Kriza. In fact, everything that a documentary filmmaker is not supposed to do—making friends with the protagonist, winning his confidence and sympathy, then, from time to time, leaving the camera rolling and letting the subject think it has been turned off. In that way, the viewer got to learn what an extreme right-winger really thinks about immigrants and homo-

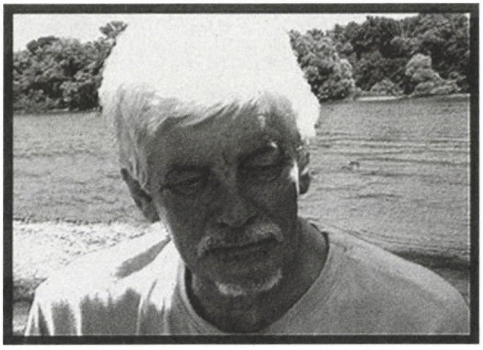
sexuals—not that there is anything one doesn't know already ("Bunch of bloody Pakis," etc.).

Bori Kriza had no need to stoop to such methods as Hungary's neo-Nazis have never got within sniffing distance of political correctness: they are bold enough, proud enough, to be able to say straight to camera, without turning a hair, blood-curdlingly sinister inanities, the crudest possible anti-Semitic or anti-Roma jibes.

One of the chief virtues of *Rocking the Nation* is that it remains impartial, taking a strictly outside-observer stance, and that includes how it views the menagerie that passes before one's eyes in the amazing scenes shot in the Hungarian Island, for example. Another aspect on which the film scores highly is for its editing and setting out. Clever cutting has enabled the different voices to chime or to be bounced off each other, using image and sound to uncover the lies or, come to that, the smug self-deceptions that are heard from the female singer of Romantic Violence, who for me was the most interesting (and also puzzling) figure in the whole story. It is hard to know what to make of Balázs Sziva too, giving an impression of being both leader and prisoner of the pack in which he moves. That circle is suffocatingly close, narrow and airless, poisoned with hatred, paranoid delusions and pig-ignorance; for them, the answer to any of history's or society's many cares and problems and thorny issues is, if at all possible, the labels "Jew" or "Gypsy".

Rocking the Nation is also a film about music, even if the music is nothing to write home about. The use of pounding three-chord numbers that echo the skinhead punk-rock of the past is even more devoid of imagination than usual. The other skein draws on the subject matter and figurations of Hungarian folk songs, but is nothing more than commonplace. (It is when playing this material that the band becomes overwhelmed by emotion and the proximity to "high art".) Indeed, perhaps their most alarming trait is that they take themselves absolutely seriously. They deeply despise humour, playfulness or (self-) irony—anything human is alien to them. ❧

Peter Doherty



12 February 1943–18 February 2009

He lived for sixty-six years and one week. Four years short of the three score and ten allotted by the Psalmist. For twenty-six of them we were colleagues as Language Editors on the staff of this journal, a third of his life and a quarter of mine. And friends.

We last spoke on his birthday. I rang him at home: he was laid low with lumbago. A nuisance, a damned painful nuisance, but not a fatal illness. A week later, taken to hospital for a proper check-up, he suffered a stroke from which he did not recover. A sudden death.

He was just about twenty years younger than me yet I would never have thought of him as a young colleague or friend. Perhaps because he was so well read in 20th-century history. He was born within a forthnight of the surrender at Stalingrad, but to talk to him you wouldn't know it. You'd think he had heard it all on the news or read it in that day's paper, as he kept up to date with the day's events online to the end. But no, it was all books. He read in his sixties as others read at age eighteen. True, I've never seen him read walking, but he read on the bus oblivious to all around him, as he read drinking coffee. Omnivorous. Poetry, novels, everything. When someone misquoted Shakespeare, I might have a vague feeling and then I'd go and look it up. Peter just knew.

He was a family man. Not just Ági, and Anna, and the dog. His parents and siblings, too, and their spouses and offspring, but also his in-laws, here in Budapest. I don't think I know anyone else who spoke about his in-laws—unknown though they were to the person he was talking to—in his ordinary conversation as Peter did.

On his 60th birthday Ági, his wife, had prepared a surprise for him. We all assembled in a large private room in a restaurant near their home. It was like

at a proper wedding: everyone knew some of the others but no one knew everybody, or even the majority. No one except Peter and Ági. And then the two of them appeared. Peter's face showed that it had been a well-kept secret. He had thought they were on their way to Ági's brother for lunch and were just calling in to book a table for later that week. And there were his friends, not half a dozen or a dozen, but many more. Colleagues, former students, neighbours, just friends. Peter was not new to Budapest. He had been a British Council recruited lecturer in the English Department of the University of Budapest (ELTE) before he joined us.

Last but by no means least, Peter was an Irishman. You couldn't imagine less of a stage Irishman, no hint of a brogue that I could discern. It would surprise me indeed if anyone anywhere, even if he was the sole Irishman in the company, called him Paddy or Mick. Here, in Budapest, in an Hungarian context, his Irishness was most manifest in the scorn he felt for the supposed identity of nation and language. He was not a Gaelic speaker.

Peter's Irishness could perhaps be best defined by what he felt about James Joyce and *Ulysses*. What's so special about that, one might ask? Don't we all share in that? Indeed, some of us suspect that there are a fair few Irishmen on the Bloomsday Bandwaggon who have come on board just for the drink. Peter, as a reader and man, shared in this universal aspect, as an Irishman. However, as an Irishman of his kind, he was more equal than others. None, I am sure, begrudged him this.

On Bloomsday, in the year Peter turned sixty and I turned eighty, I said to him: here we are, at our age, never mind the twenty years between us, we still identify with Stephen Dedalus, yet we are both old enough to be Leopold Bloom's father.

Ash Wednesday 2009
Rudolf Fischer

Rudolf Fischer,
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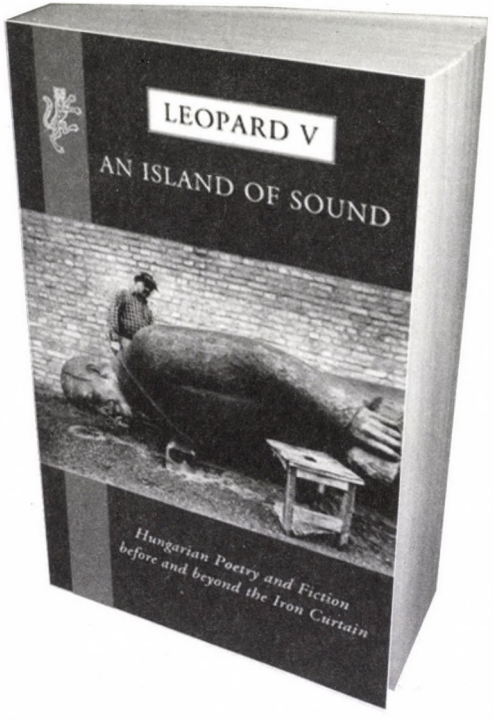
An extraordinary literary journey through the second half of the twentieth century



AN ISLAND OF SOUND

Hungarian Poetry and Fiction before and beyond the Iron Curtain

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Hungarians lived through more changes and upheavals in 1988 than in any one year since 1956. Politics burst onto the streets—whether officially permitted or not—and János Kádár, in his dotage, was dislodged from the country's helm, which he had steered since 1956. In terms of Eastern European politics, this was a peaceful changing of the guard. The sense of the end of an era and uncertainty about the future was pervasive. Hungary had a forty-year-old prime minister by November his government was to be swept along by the avalanche of 1989.

Annus Mirabilis:
A Year in Photos
by Mariann Kiscsatári